

CHAPTER

1

Film as Art: Creativity, Technology, and Business

Motion pictures are so much a part of our lives that it's hard to imagine a world without them. We enjoy them in theaters, at home, in offices, in cars and buses, and on airplanes. We carry films with us in our laptops, tablets, and cellphones. Press a button, and a machine conjures up movies for your pleasure.

Films communicate information and ideas, and they show us places and ways of life we might not otherwise know. Important as these benefits are, though, something more is at stake. Films offer us ways of seeing and feeling that we find deeply gratifying. They take us through experiences. The experiences are often driven by stories centering on characters we come to care about, but a film might also develop an idea or explore visual qualities or sound textures.

Such things don't happen by accident. Films are *designed* to create experiences for viewers. To gain an understanding of film as an art, we should ask why a film is designed the way it is. When a scene frightens or excites us, when an ending makes us laugh or cry, we can ask how the filmmakers have achieved those effects.

It helps to imagine that we're filmmakers, too. Throughout this book, we'll be asking you to put yourself in the filmmaker's shoes.

This shouldn't be a great stretch. You've taken still photos with a camera or a mobile phone. Very likely you've made some videos, perhaps just to record a moment in your life—a party, a wedding, your cat creeping into a paper bag. And central to filmmaking is the act of choice. You may not have realized it at the moment, but every time you framed a shot, shifted your position, told people not to blink, or tried to keep up with a dog chasing a Frisbee, you were making choices.

You might take the next step and make a more ambitious, more controlled film. You might compile clips into a YouTube video, or document your friend's musical performance. Again, at every stage you make design decisions, based on how you think this image or that sound will affect your viewers' experience. What if you start your music video with a black screen that gradually brightens as the music fades in? That will have a different effect than starting it with a sudden cut to a bright screen and a blast of music.

At each instant, the filmmaker can't avoid making creative decisions about how viewers will respond. Every moviemaker is also a movie viewer, and the choices are considered from the standpoint of the end user. Filmmakers constantly ask themselves: *If I do this, as opposed to that, how will viewers react?*

The menu of filmmaking choices has developed over time. Late in the 19th century, moving pictures emerged as a public amusement. They succeeded because they spoke to the imaginative needs of a broad-based audience. All the traditions

that emerged—telling fictional stories, recording actual events, animating objects or drawings, experimenting with pure form—aimed to give viewers experiences they couldn't get from other media. Men and women discovered that they could use cinema to shape those experiences in various ways. Suppose we center the actors so they command the frame space? Suppose we cut up a scene into shots taken from several angles? Suppose we move the camera to follow the actors? Learning from one another, testing and refining new choices, filmmakers developed skills that became the basis of the art form we have today.

Thinking like a filmmaker is all very well, you might say, if you want a career in the business. What if you just want to enjoy movies? We think that you can appreciate films more fully if you're aware of how creative choices shape your experience. You've probably looked at some making-of bonuses on DVD versions of films you love, and some of those supplements have increased your enjoyment. We enhance our appreciation of *The Social Network* or *Inception* when we know something of the filmmakers' behind-the-scenes discussion of character motivation and specific line readings. We can always get more out of the films we see, and thinking about the filmmakers' choices helps us to understand why we respond as we do.

This is why we start our survey of film art by looking at the process of film production. Here we can see, in very tangible ways, the sorts of options available to people working in this medium. In every chapter that follows, we invoke what film artists have said about the ways they've chosen to solve creative problems.

Throughout this book, we focus on the two basic areas of choice and control in the art of film: form and style. **Form** is the overall patterning of a film, the ways its parts work together to create specific effects (Chapters 2 and 3). **Style** involves the film's use of cinematic techniques. Those techniques fall into four categories: mise-en-scene, or the arrangement of people, places, and objects to be filmed (Chapter 4); cinematography, the use of cameras and other machines to record images and sounds (Chapter 5); editing, the piecing together of individual shots (Chapter 6); and sound, the voices, effects, and music that blend on a film's audio track (Chapter 7). After examining the various techniques, Chapter 8 integrates them in an overview of film style.

In later chapters, we discuss how form and style differ among genres and other types of films (Chapters 9–10). We consider how we can analyze films critically (Chapter 11) and how film form and style have changed across history, offering filmmakers different sets of creative choices (Chapter 12). In all, we'll see how through choice and control, film artists create movies that entertain us, inform us, and engage our imaginations.

Art vs. Entertainment? Art vs. Business?

The term “art” might put some readers off. If cinema originated as a mass medium, should we even use the word? Are Hollywood directors “artists”? Some people would say that the blockbusters playing at the multiplex are merely “entertainment,” but films for a narrower public—perhaps independent films, or foreign-language fare, or experimental works—are true art.

Usually the art/entertainment split rests on a value judgment: Art is serious and worthy; entertainment is superficial. Yet things aren't that simple. Many of the artistic resources of cinema were discovered by filmmakers working for the general public. During the 1910s and 1920s, for instance, many filmmakers who simply aimed to be entertaining pioneered new possibilities for film editing.

As for the matter of value, it's clear that popular traditions can foster art of high quality. Shakespeare and Dickens wrote for broad audiences. Much of the greatest 20th-century music, including jazz and the blues, was rooted in popular traditions. Cinema is an art because it offers filmmakers ways to design experiences

for viewers, and those experiences can be valuable regardless of their pedigree. Films for audiences both small and large belong to that very inclusive art we call film or cinema.

Sometimes, too, people consider film *art* to be opposed to film as a *business*. This split is related to the issue of entertainment, since entertainment generally is sold to a mass audience. In most modern societies, however, no art floats free from economic ties. Novels good, bad, and indifferent are published because publishers and authors expect to sell them. Painters hope that collectors and museums will acquire their work. True, some artworks are funded through subsidy or private donations, but that process, too, involves the artists in financial transactions.

Films are no different. Some movies are made in the hope that consumers will pay to see them. Others are funded by patronage (an investor or organization wants to see the film made) or public money. (France, for instance, generously subsidizes film projects.) Crowdfunding sites such as Kickstarter offer another alternative. You might make short videos for YouTube or Vimeo at little cost, but if you hope to make a feature-length digital movie, you face the problem of paying for it. If you can't profit from your film, you may still hope that the project will lead to a job.

The crucial point is that considerations of business don't necessarily make the artist less creative or the project less worthwhile. Money can corrupt any activity, but it doesn't have to. In Renaissance Italy, painters were commissioned by the Catholic Church to illustrate events from the Bible. Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci worked for hire, but we revere their artistry.

In this book we won't assume that film art precludes entertainment. We won't take the opposite position either, claiming that only Hollywood mass-market movies are worth our attention. Similarly, we don't think that film art rises above commercial demands, but we also won't assume that money rules everything. Any art form offers a vast range of creative possibilities.

As an art, film offers experiences that viewers find worthwhile—diverting, provocative, puzzling, or rapturous. But how do films do that? To answer that question, let's go back a step and ask: Where do movies come from?

They come from three places. They come from the imagination and hard work of the filmmakers who create them. They come from a complex set of machines that capture and transform images and sounds. And they come from companies or individuals who pay for the filmmakers and the technology. This chapter examines the artistic, technological, and business sides of how films come into being.

Creative Decisions in Filmmaking

In *Day for Night*, French filmmaker François Truffaut plays a director making a movie called *Meet Pamela*. Crew members bring set designs, wigs, cars, and prop pistols to him, and we hear his voice telling us his thoughts: "What is a director? A director is someone who is asked questions about everything."

Making a film can be seen as a long process of decision making, not just by the director but by all the specialists who work on the production team. Screenwriters, producers, directors, performers, and technicians are constantly solving problems and making choices. A great many of those decisions affect what we see and hear on the screen. There are business choices about the budget, marketing, distribution, and payments. Connected to those choices are the artistic ones. What lighting will enhance the atmosphere of a love scene? Given the kind of story being told, would it be better to let the audience know what the central character is thinking or to keep her enigmatic? When a scene opens, what is the most economical way of letting the audience identify the time and place? We can see how decisions shape the process by looking in more detail at a single production.

CREATIVE DECISIONS

To See into the Night in *Collateral*

Michael Mann's *Collateral*, released in 2004, is a visually striking psychological thriller set in Los Angeles in a single night. The mysterious Vincent (Tom Cruise) hires a cab driver, Max (Jamie Foxx), to drive him to several appointments. When Max learns that Vincent is a hired killer, he struggles to break their bargain and escape. But Vincent forces him to carry on as a getaway driver. In the course of the evening, the two men spar verbally and move toward a climactic chase and confrontation.

Mann and his crew made thousands of decisions during the making of *Collateral*. Here we look at five important choices: one that influenced the film's form and one each for our four categories of mise-en-scene, cinematography, editing, and sound. Several of these decisions involved new technologies that became standard production tools.

Scriptwriter Stuart Beattie originally set *Collateral* in New York City. In the screenplay, Max was a loser, hiding from the world in his cab and getting little out of life. Vincent was to goad him about his failures until Max had finally had enough and stood up to him. Once Mann came on board as director, he altered the plot in several ways. The setting became Los Angeles. Max became less a loser and more a laid-back, intelligent man content to observe the world from behind a steering wheel, endlessly delaying his plans to start his own limousine service. This more appealing Max becomes our point-of-view figure for most of the film. For example, we don't see the first murder but stay with Max in the cab until the shocking moment when a body hurtles down onto his cab roof. The story largely consists of Max's conflict with Vincent, so Mann's decision to change Max's traits altered their confrontations as well. In the finished film, moments of reluctant mutual respect and even hints of friendship complicate the men's relationship. Such decisions as these reshaped the film's overall narrative form.

The switch to Los Angeles profoundly affected the film's style. For Mann, one of the attractions was that this tale of randomly crossing destinies took place almost entirely at night, from 6:04 P.M. to 4:20 A.M. He wanted to portray the atmospheric Los Angeles night, where haze and cloud cover reflect the city's lights back to the vast grid of streets. According to cinematographer Paul Cameron, "The goal was to make the L.A. night as much of a character in the story as Vincent and Max were."

This was a major decision that created the film's look. Mann was determined not to use more artificial light than was absolutely necessary. He relied to a considerable degree on street lights, neon signs, vehicle headlights, and other sources in the locations where filming took place. To achieve an eerie radiance, his team came up with a cutting-edge combination of tools.

Digital Cinematography Certain choices about photographing *Collateral* were central to its final look and also dictated many other decisions. For example, at that time Hollywood productions employed cameras loaded with rolls of photographic film. Night scenes were shot using large banks of specialized spot- and floodlights. If the light was too weak, dark areas would tend to go a uniform black.

Mann and his cinematographers decided to shoot portions of *Collateral* on recently developed high-definition (HD) digital cameras. Those cameras could shoot on location with little or no light added to the scene (1.1). They could also capture the distinctive night glow of Los Angeles. As Mann put it, "Film doesn't record what our eyes can see at night. That's why I moved into shooting digital video in high definition—to see into the night, to see everything the naked eye can see and more. You see this moody landscape with hills and trees and strange light patterns. I wanted that to be the world that Vincent and Max are moving through."



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We examine an unusual problem and a director's unusual solution in "Problems, problems, Wyler's workaround."

1.1–1.3 Digital filming for *Collateral*. A digital camera shoots in a dim alley. As in many shots, the skyline of downtown Los Angeles figures prominently (1.1). An eerily glowing cityscape, with digital cinematography making a row of palm trees stand out against a dark sky (1.2). Vincent stalks one of his victims in a law library with huge windows overlooking the city (1.3). On regular photographic film, the streets and buildings would go uniformly dark, with only points of light visible.



1.1



1.2



1.3

Cinematographer Dion Beebe enthused, “The format’s strong point is its incredible sensitivity to light. We were able to shoot Los Angeles at night and actually see silhouettes of palm trees against the night sky, which was very exciting” (1.2). In a particularly dark scene at the climax, the characters become visible only as black shapes outlined by the myriad lights behind them (1.3). The suspense is heightened as we strain to see the figures.

Custom-Made Lights Though digital cameras could pick up a great deal in dark situations, the audience needed to see the faces of the actors clearly. Much of the action takes place inside the taxi as Max and Vincent ride and talk. The actors’ faces had to be lit, but the filmmakers wanted to avoid the sense that there was artificial light in the cab.

To create a soft, diffuse light, the filmmakers tried an innovative approach: electroluminescent display (ELD) panels. The technology had been used in digital watches and cellphones, but it had never been employed in filming. Flexible plastic panels of various sizes were custom made, all with Velcro backings that would stick to the seats and ceiling of the cab (1.4, 1.5). These ELD panels could then be turned on in various combinations. Although they look bright in Figure 1.5, the effect on the screen was a soft glow on the actors. In a shot like Figure 1.6, we might simply take it for granted that the light coming through the windows and the glow of the dashboard panel are all that shines on the characters. Such dim illumination on the faces allows the lights visible through the windows to be brighter than they are, helping to keeping the city “as much of a character in the story as Vincent and Max were.”

Here’s a case where an artistic decision led to new technology. Since *Collateral* was made, a similar lighting technology, the light-emitting diode (LED) has become common in flashlights, auto tail lights, scoreboard displays, and computer monitors. Specially designed LED units have become central to film production. Mann’s team solved a problem in mise-en-scene, and a new option was added to the menu available to other filmmakers.



1.4



1.5



1.6

1.4–1.6 Unobtrusive lighting. One of the ELD panels specially made for illuminating the cab interior (1.4). Several ELD panels were attached to the back of a seat to shine on Tom Cruise as Vincent (1.5). The units created a dim glow on the actors (1.6).

Seamless Editing *Collateral* contains several dynamic action scenes, including a spectacular car crash. The plan was for a cab going nearly 60 miles per hour to flip, then bounce and roll several times before coming to rest upside down. If we put ourselves in the filmmakers’ place, we can imagine their options about how to show the crash.

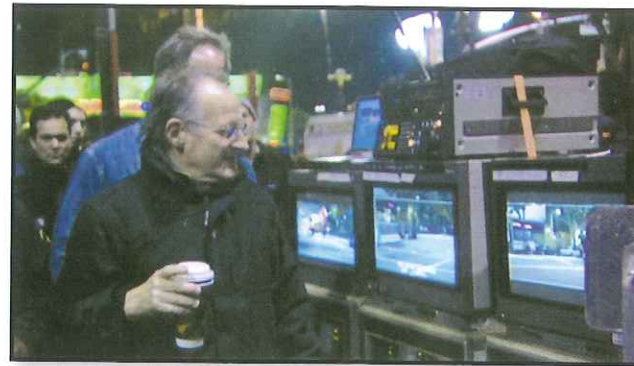
Mann’s team could have put the camera in a single spot and swiveled it to follow the car rolling past. That might have been a good idea if the scene showed us the crash through the eyes of an onlooker whose head turns to watch it. But there is no character witnessing the crash.

The filmmakers decided to generate excitement by showing several shots of the car rolling, each taken from a different point along the trajectory of the crash. One option would have been to use several cabs and execute numerous similar crashes, each time filmed by a single camera that would be moved between crashes from place to place to record the action from a new vantage point. Such a procedure would have been very expensive, however, and no two crashes would have taken place in exactly the same way. Splicing together shots from each crash might have created discrepancies in the car’s position, resulting in poor “matches on action,” as we’ll term this technique in Chapter 6.

Instead, the team settled on a technique commonly used for big action scenes. Along the cab’s path were stationed multiple cameras, all filming at once (1.7). The economic benefits were that only one car had to be crashed and the high expense of keeping many crew members working on retakes was reduced. Artistically, the resulting footage allowed the editing team to choose portions of many shots and splice them together in precise ways (1.8, 1.9). The result is an exciting stream of shots, each taken from farther along the taxi’s path.

Music in Movements Composers are fond of saying that their music for a film should serve the story so well that the audience doesn’t notice it. For *Collateral*, Mann wanted James Newton Howard to score the climax so as to not

1.7–1.9 Editing a car crash. On location after the execution of the car crash in *Collateral*, director Michael Mann surveys digital monitors displaying shots taken by multiple cameras covering the action (1.7). The result: A seamless continuation of the cab's movement. A shot taken from one camera shows the car flipping over, its hood flapping wildly (1.8) is followed by a cut to another shot, taken from a camera placed on the ground and continuing the same movement, now with the vehicle rolling toward the viewer (1.9). This particular camera was placed in a very thick metal case.



1.7



1.8



1.9

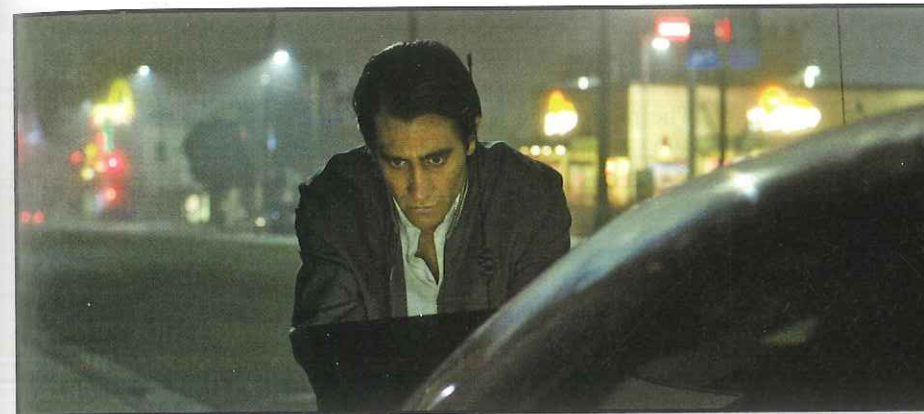
build up excitement too quickly. According to Howard, “Michael was very clear about the climax taking place in three movements.” “Movements” as a term is usually applied to the parts of a symphony, a concerto, or a sonata. Thus the idea was that the score for this last part of the film should play a major role in shaping the progression and rhythm of the action.

At the climax, Vincent is trying to kill a character who is important to Max, while Max tries frantically to save both himself and the other character. Howard and Mann called the first musical movement “The Race to Warn,” since Vincent gets ahead of Max in running to the building where the potential victim is located. Despite the fact that both men are running and the situation is suspenseful, Howard avoids rapid rhythms. He begins with long-held string chords over a deep, rumbling sound, then adds sustained brass chords with a strong beat accompanying them. The music is dynamic but doesn’t reach a high pitch of excitement.

The second movement, “The Cat and Mouse,” accompanies Vincent getting into the building, turning off the electricity, and stalking his victim in near darkness (1.3). Again, the chords are slow, with ominous undertones, dissonant glides, and, at a few points, fast, eerie high-string figures as Vincent nears his goal. During the most suspenseful moments in the scene, when Vincent and his prey are in the darkened room, strings and soft, clicking percussion accompany their cautious, hesitant movements.

Finally, there is a swift chase sequence, and here Howard’s score is louder and faster, with driving tympani in very quick rhythm as the danger grows. Once the chase tapers off, the percussion ends, and slow, low strings accompany the final quiet shots.

These decisions and many others affect our experience of *Collateral*. Thanks to the digital imagery and innovative lighting, we have a sense of characters moving through an eerie, unfamiliar-looking world. The editing of the crash allows the taxi to come hurtling toward the camera several times. The music accompanying the fast-chase/slow-stalking/fast-chase climax helps heighten the suspense and build the excitement. Creative decision making is central to every film, and *Collateral*



1.10 The legacy of *Collateral*. The sleazy news photographer protagonist of *Nightcrawler* pauses on the street to check some footage he has just shot. The dim light on his face comes entirely from the glow of his laptop and street lamps reflecting off his car.

stands out for making several unusual choices. *Collateral*’s innovative visual style showed later filmmakers what digital tools could do. Director Tony Scott replicated the HD sheen of the film in his *Déjà vu*. Cinematographer Robert Elswit’s half-beautiful, half-creepy images for *Nightcrawler* (1.10) provide a similar look into the Los Angeles night.

Mechanics of the Movies

Filmmaking relies on technology and financing. First, filmmakers need fairly complicated machines. Anyone with a pen and paper can write a novel, and a talented kid with a guitar can become a musician. Movies demand much more. Even the simplest home video camera is based on fiendishly complex technology. A major film involves elaborate cameras, lighting equipment, multitrack sound-mixing studios, sophisticated laboratories, and computer-generated special effects.

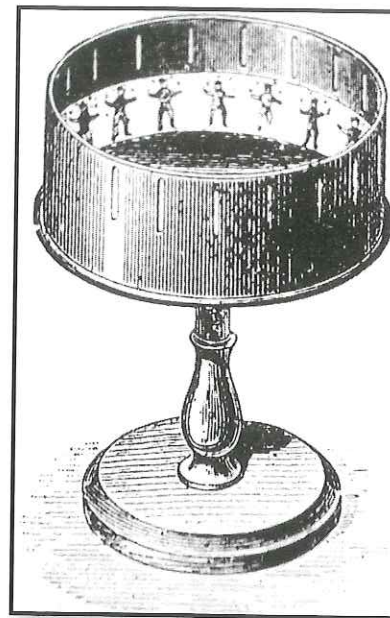
Partly because of the technology, making a movie also involves businesses. Companies manufacture the equipment, other companies provide funding for the film, still others distribute it, and finally theaters and other venues present the result to an audience. In the rest of this chapter, we consider how these two sides of making movies—technology and business—shape film as an art.

Illusion Machines

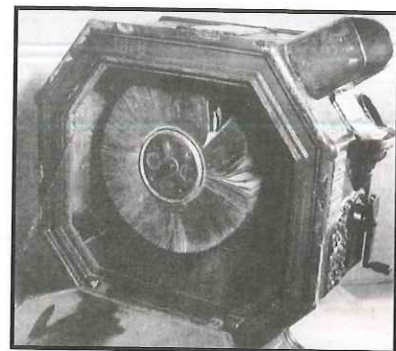
Moving-image media such as film and video couldn’t exist if human vision were perfect. Our eyes are very sensitive, but they can be tricked. As anyone who has paused a DVD knows, a film consists of a series of *frames*, or still pictures. Yet we don’t perceive the separate frames. Instead, we see continuous light and movement. What creates this impression?

For a long time people thought that the effect results from “persistence of vision,” the tendency of an image to linger briefly on our retina. Yet if this were the cause, we’d see a bewildering blur of superimposed stills instead of smooth action. At present, researchers believe that two psychological processes are involved in cinematic motion: critical flicker fusion and apparent motion.

If you flash a light faster and faster, at a certain point (around 50 flashes per second), you see not a pulsating light but a continuous beam. A film is usually shot and projected at 24 still frames per second. The projector shutter breaks the light beam once as a new image is slid into place and once while it is held in place. Thus each



1.11



1.12

1.11–1.12 Early moving-image gadgets. The Zoetrope, which dates back to 1834, spun its images on a strip of paper in a rotating drum (1.11). The Mutoscope, an early-20th-century entertainment, displayed images by flipping a row of cards in front of a peephole (1.12).

frame is actually projected on the screen twice. This raises the number of flashes to 48, the threshold of what is called *critical flicker fusion*. Early silent films were shot at a lower rate (often 16 or 20 images per second), and projectors broke the beam only once per image. The picture had a pronounced flicker—hence an early slang term for movies, “flickers,” which survives today when people call a film a “flick.”

Apparent motion is a second factor in creating cinema’s illusion. If a visual display is changed rapidly enough, our eye can be fooled into seeing movement. Neon advertising signs often seem to show a thrusting arrow, but that illusion is created simply by static lights flashing on and off at a particular rate. Certain cells in our eyes and brain are devoted to analyzing motion, brightness, and edges. Any stimulus presenting changes in those features tricks those cells into sending the wrong message.

Apparent motion and critical flicker fusion are quirks in our visual system, and technology can exploit those quirks to produce illusions. Some moving-image machines predate the invention of film (1.11, 1.12). Film as we know it came into being when photographic images were first imprinted on strips of flexible celluloid.

Making Films with Photographic Film

Until the 2000s, cinema was almost entirely a photochemical medium. Most of the movies we use as examples in this book were shot on photographic film, as were nearly all the films that you watch on DVD or streaming. Although digital production has become common, some directors and cinematographers still prefer photochemical media. So we’ll look first at motion pictures shot on film.

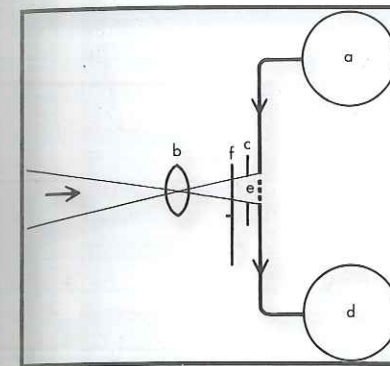
Physically, a photographically based film is a ribbon of still images, each one slightly different from its mates. That ribbon starts life as unexposed film stock in a camera. Eventually the finished movie is another strip of film run through a projector. Both the camera and the projector move the film strip one frame at a time past a light source. For a fraction of a second, the image is held in place before the next one replaces it. In a camera, the lens gathers light from the scene photographed, while a projector uses a light source to cast the images on the screen. In a sense, the projector is just an inverted camera (1.13, 1.14).

In filming, the most common shooting rate is 24 frames per second (fps), and in projection the same rate is usually maintained. In the 35mm format, the film whizzes through the projector at 90 feet per minute, meaning that a two-hour feature will consist of about two miles of film.

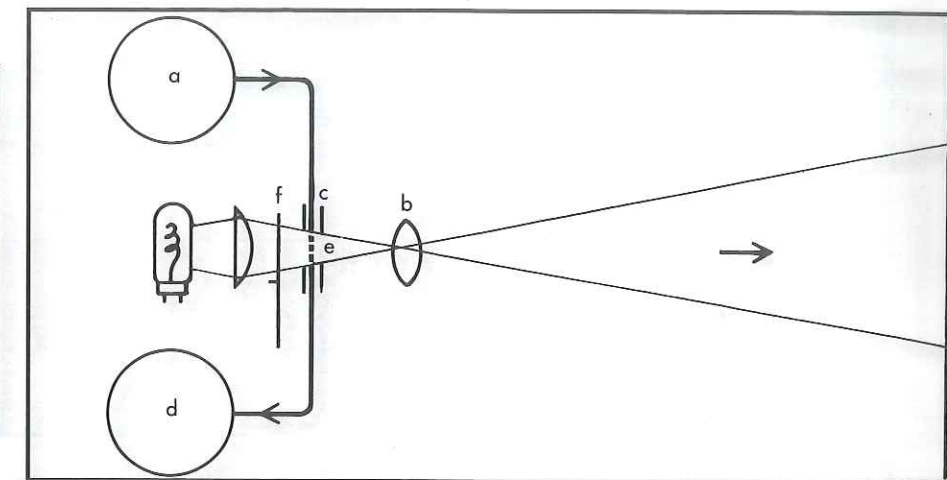
The film strip that emerges from the camera is usually a *negative*. That is, its colors and light values are the opposite of those in the original scene. For the images to be projected, a *positive* print must be made. This is done on another machine, the *printer*, which duplicates or modifies the footage from the camera. Like a projector, the printer controls the passage of light through film—in this case, a negative. Like a camera, it focuses light to form an image—in this case, on the unexposed roll of film. Although the filmmaker can create nonphotographic images on the film strip by drawing, painting, or scratching, most filmmakers in the predigital era have relied on the camera, the printer, and other photographic technology.

If you were to handle the film that runs through these machines, you’d notice several things. One side is much shinier than the other. Motion picture film consists of a transparent plastic *base* (the shiny side), which supports an *emulsion*, layers of gelatin containing light-sensitive materials. On a black-and-white film strip, the emulsion contains grains of silver halide. Color film emulsion adds layers of chemical dyes that react with the silver halide components. In both cases, billions of microscopic particles form clusters of light, dark, and color corresponding to the scene photographed.

What enables film to run through a camera, a printer, and a projector? The strip is perforated along both edges, so that small teeth (called *sprockets*) in the machines can seize the perforations (sprocket holes) and pull the film at a uniform rate and smoothness. The strip also reserves space for a sound track.



1.13



1.14

1.13–1.14 Moving the film: Camera and projector. In a light-tight chamber (1.13), a drive mechanism feeds the unexposed motion picture film from a reel (a) past a lens (b) and aperture (c) to a take-up reel (d). The lens focuses light reflected from a scene onto each frame of film (e). The mechanism moves the film intermittently, with a brief pause while each frame is held in the aperture. A shutter (f) admits light through the lens only when each frame is unmoving and ready for exposure. The projector is basically an inverted camera, with the light source inside the machine rather than in the world outside (1.14). A drive mechanism feeds the film from a reel (a) past a lens (b) and aperture (c) to a take-up reel (d). Light is beamed through the images (e) and magnified by the lens for projection on a screen. Again, a mechanism moves the film intermittently past the aperture, while a shutter (f) admits light only when each frame is pausing.

The size and placement of the perforations and the area occupied by the sound track have been standardized around the world. So, too, has the width of the film strip, which is called the *gauge* and is measured in millimeters. For most of cinema history, commercial theaters used 35mm film, but other gauges also have been standardized internationally: Super 8mm, 16mm, and 70mm (1.15–1.19).

Usually image quality increases with the width of the film because the greater picture area gives the images better definition and detail. All other things being equal, 35mm provides significantly better picture quality than 16mm, and 70mm is superior to both. The finest photographic quality currently available for public screenings is that offered by the Imax system (1.20).

With the rise of digital filmmaking, 16mm has declined as an amateur gauge. If you take an introductory production course, you are more likely to shoot with a digital camera than a 16mm one. Yet a higher-quality version of the gauge, Super 16mm, still gets used in commercial films seeking to economize or to achieve a “documentary look.” Recent films utilizing Super 16mm include *The Wrestler*, *The Hurt Locker*, *Black Swan*, and *Moonrise Kingdom*. The comedy *The World’s End* combined 35mm and regular 16mm. Super 8 film is still occasionally used in professional production, usually to simulate home movies or television images; *Super 8* used both Super 16 and Super 8 to present the amateur footage shot by its young protagonists. Imax and other cameras employing 65mm film have been used for fiction films, including some scenes in *The Dark Knight*, *Inception*, *Mission Impossible: Ghost Protocol*, *Gravity*, and *Interstellar*.

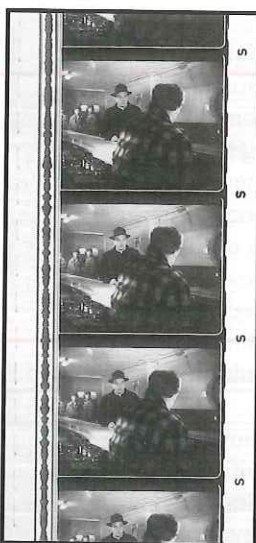
The sound track runs along the side of the film strip. Magnetic tracks, consisting of magnetic tape running along the film strip (1.19), have virtually vanished. Most films today have an optical sound track, which encodes sonic information in the form of patches of light and dark running along the frames. During production, electrical impulses from a microphone are translated into pulsations of light, which are photographically inscribed on the moving film strip. When the film is projected, the optical track produces varying intensities of light that are translated back into electrical impulses and then into sound waves. The optical sound track of 16mm



1.15 Super 8mm



1.16 16mm



1.17 35mm

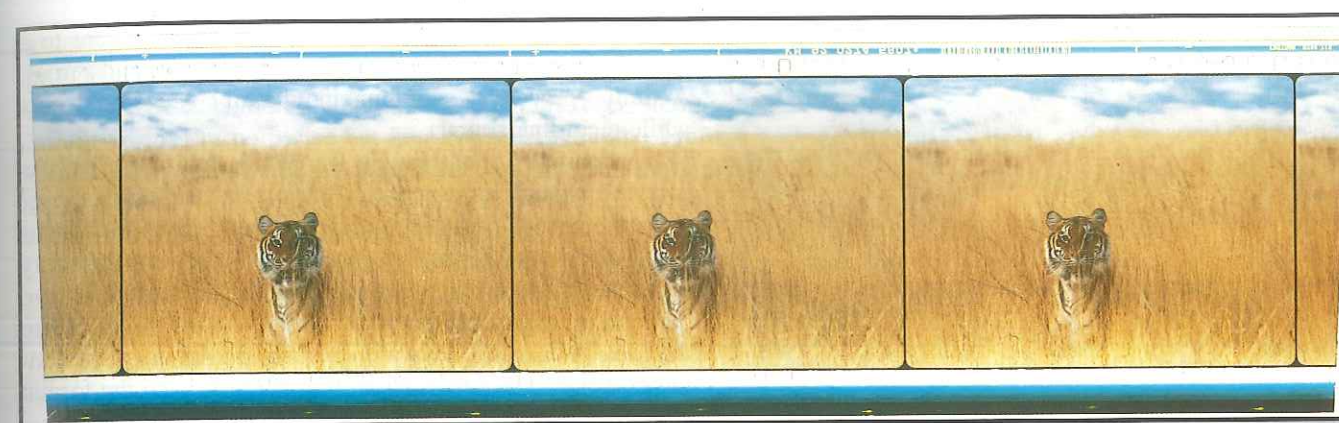


1.18 35mm



1.19 70mm

1.15–1.19 Film gauges. Super 8mm (1.15) has been a popular gauge for amateurs and experimental filmmakers. *Year of the Horse*, a concert film featuring Neil Young, was shot partly on Super 8. 16mm film (1.16) has been used for both amateur and professional film work. A variable-area optical sound track (p. 13) runs down the right side. 35mm film (1.17) is the standard theatrical film gauge. In this sample a variable-area sound track runs down the side of the strip. A 35mm strip from *Jurassic Park* (1.18) shows an optical (analog) stereophonic sound track (p. 13) on the left of the images, encoded as two parallel squiggles. The Morse code–like dots between the stereophonic track and the picture area are a timecode to sync the film with DTS files on a CD-ROM. 70mm film (1.19), another theatrical gauge, was used for historical spectacles and epic action films into the 1990s. In this strip from *The Hunt for Red October*, a stereophonic magnetic sound track runs along both edges of the film strip and between the edges of the picture and the sprocket holes, allowing for six discrete channels of sound.



1.20 Imax film. The Imax image is printed on 70mm film but runs horizontally along the strip, allowing each image to be 10 times larger than 35mm and triple the size of 70mm. The Imax film can be projected on a very large screen with no loss of detail.

film is on the right side (1.16), whereas 35mm puts an optical track on the left (1.17, 1.18). In each, the sound is usually encoded as *variable area*, a wavy contour of black and white along the picture strip.

A film's sound track may be *monophonic* or *stereophonic*. The 16mm film strip (1.16) and the first 35mm film strip (1.17) have monophonic optical tracks. Stereophonic optical sound is registered as a pair of squiggles running down the left side (1.18). For digital sound, a string of dots and dashes running along the film's perforations, or between the perforations, or close to the very left edge of the frames provides the sound-track information. The projector scans these marks as if reading a bar code.

Filmmaking with Digital Media

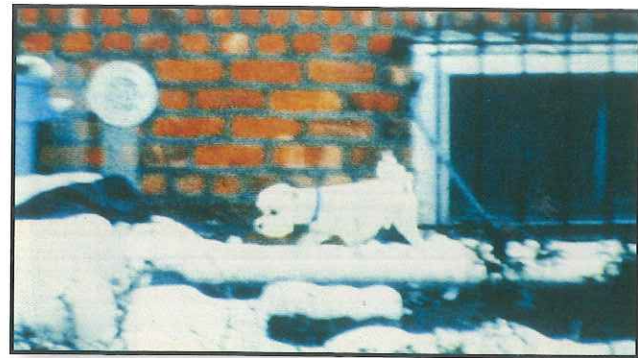
Digital information technology gave filmmakers a set of new tools. Computers first came into use in editing and in special-effects processes, and eventually digital shooting and projection became feasible. The term "digital film" may seem contradictory, but almost immediately everyone understood it. Just as audio books and e-books were still called books, digital films counted as films, even though they never involved light hitting celluloid. Some people prefer to speak of "digital capture" rather than "digital filming," but most call digital image-creators "filmmakers." So will we.

Digital Filming To some extent a professional digital motion picture camera functions in the same way as the 35mm camera. The camera operator uses a viewfinder to frame a scene. There are controls to manipulate exposure and the speed of recording. At the front, a lens gathers and focuses light reflected from the scene. A shutterlike mechanism breaks the input into frames, usually 24 per second. A professional digital camera also looks very much like a traditional 35mm camera (1.21). The design reflects manufacturers' effort to make the new device feel familiar to cinematographers. Some digital cameras can accept lenses designated for 35mm machines.

Instead of a strip of film whizzing through a gate behind the lens, the digital camera has a fixed sensor. The sensor is covered with a grid of millions of microscopic diodes, or photosites. Each of these diodes measures a tiny portion of the light. The diodes create pixels (short for "picture elements") in the final image. The sensor converts these



1.21 Digital motion picture camera. An operator with an Arri Alexa, one of the most widely used professional digital cameras, mounted on a Steadicam support. The operator watches the image being filmed on a monitor rather than through a viewfinder. The back of the camera and the bottom of the Steadicam have batteries attached, and the attachment at the middle right is a gimbal to stabilize the camera as the operator moves.



1.22 Combining digital video and film. In *Julien Donkey-Boy*, pixels and grain yield a unique texture, and the high contrast exaggerates pure colors and shapes to create a hallucinatory image.

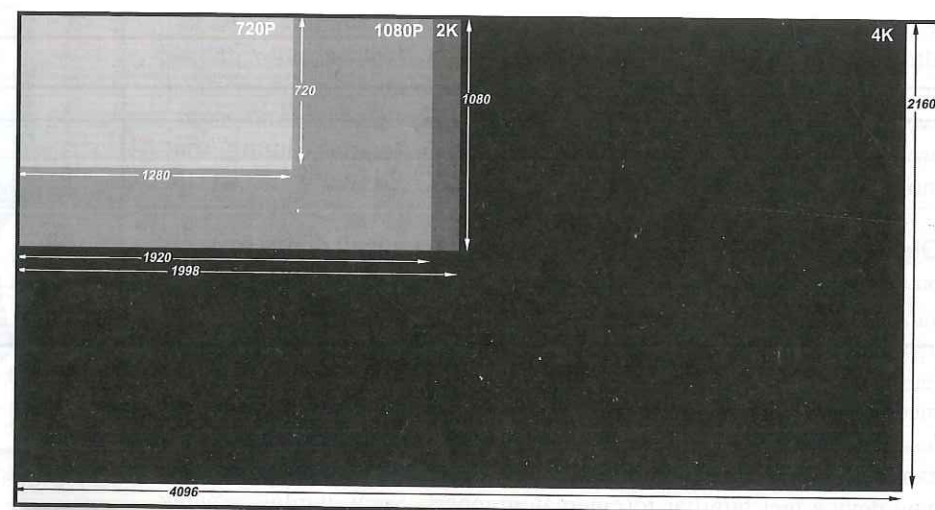
patterns of light into electrical impulses that are sent to a recording medium and registered as files of ones and zeroes. A similar process of sampling and digital conversion occurs while recording sound.

A frame of photographic film holds billions of specks carrying visual information. But pixels are much larger than photographic molecules, so making digital imagery as finely detailed as 35mm is a challenge. Digital image quality depends on several factors, including the size of the sensor, the number of pixels, and the type of compression applied to the files. As a result, several formats of digital image recording emerged. The first wave in the 1990s utilized the format known as digital video (DV). The images were quite low resolution (about 350,000 pixels), but lit by an experienced cinematographer they could be attractive, as in Spike Lee's *Bamboozled*, shot by Ellen Kuras. Some filmmakers played

up the pebbly textures of DV imagery. *Dancer in the Dark* uses saturated DV imagery to suggest the fantasy world of a young mother going blind, while *28 Days Later* fitted the rough-edged format to a horror film. Harmony Korine shot *Julien Donkey-Boy* with mini-DV consumer cameras, transferred the footage to film, and reprinted it several times (1.22).

As digital photography improved in the 2000s, *high-definition (HD) video* emerged as a preferred choice for digital filmmaking, amateur or professional. Today HD video usually refers to digital formats of 720p and 1080p. The numbers refer to the number of horizontal lines in the display, and "p" stands for progressive scan, which refreshes each frame in the manner of a computer monitor; 720p images contain about 921,000 pixels, and 1080p images have nearly 2.1 million.

Further innovations have led to images that are sharper, more detailed, and freer of artifacts. The newer formats, often known as "digital cinema," were standardized at 2K (usually rated at 2,048 pixels across, or about 3.2 million pixels in all) and 4K (4,096 pixels across, or over 12.7 million pixels). The rectangles in Figure 1.23 represent the numbered pixels in each of these formats. The images as projected on



1.23 Pixel size of sensors in four standard digital formats. The lowest resolution digital moving image system in common use, 720p, contains 1,280 (width) by 720 (height) pixels, yielding 0.92 megapixels. (A megapixel is 1 million pixels.) 720p is used primarily for U.S. broadcast and cable television and for Internet video. The next step up is 1080 HD, with either progressive or interlaced scanning. HD commonly measures 1,920 by 1,080 pixels, for a total of 2.1 megapixels. The 2K format typically supports 1,998 by 1,080 pixels, yielding 2.2 megapixels. A typical 4K image measures 4,096 by 2,160 pixels, yielding 8.8 megapixels.

a screen would all be the same size, but the density of visual information increases proportionately with the number of pixels. Since the information carried on each image increases both vertically and horizontally, each step up multiplies the resolution: 4K carries not twice but four times the amount of information in 2K. Each format can produce images in different proportions, or aspect ratios, and these make the pixel count vary somewhat. (More on aspect ratios in Chapter 5.) Sensors come formatted for these various image sizes.

The moving images are stored on memory cards, large versions of the sort of card used in digital still photography. For more space and longer recording capacity, filmmakers turn to hard drives (1.24). When the images are downloaded and backed up, the capture medium is wiped clean for reuse. The great advantage of this system is that digital media cost much less than raw film stock, an expensive component of a traditional film's budget. The downside is that such huge amounts of data require a lot of storage space. A finished feature film may consist of 10 to 12 terabytes (TB) of data, and the amount shot may consume 350 TB. For this reason, digital imagery is subjected to many compression and decompression processes from production through to final projection. A feature film projected at your local multiplex probably takes up no more than 100 to 350 gigabytes (GB) on the hard drive file that is fed to the projector.

In the late 1990s, George Lucas commissioned Sony to make a high-quality digital camera, which he utilized on *Star Wars: Episode II—Attack of the Clones* (2002). It used the 1080p format. Michael Mann's digital camera on *Collateral* also delivered 2K-resolution images. More and more big-budget directors embraced HD digital formats, particularly for their price and convenience. Lucas claimed that apart from creating spectacular special effects, using HD for *Attack of the Clones* and *Revenge of the Sith* saved millions of dollars. A comparable system was employed on *Sin City*, which combined HD footage of the actors with graphic landscapes created in postproduction. Basing the entire project on digital technology allowed director Robert Rodriguez to edit, mix sound, and create special effects in his home studio in Austin, Texas.

Shooting in the 2K format quickly became widespread. In 2009, a few films, including *District 9*, *Che*, and *Knowing*, used 4K systems. Many have claimed that



1.24 Two types of hard-drive recording media. A recorder containing a high-capacity hard drive or "RAID unit" may be attached directly to the camera. Smaller hard drives, like the unit sitting by the camera, can be loaded into the machine. Both types may be used in combination to increase recording time.

4K images are the equal in visual quality to those of 35mm, and the format has become increasingly popular. Prestigious films such as David Fincher's *Zodiac* and *The Social Network* showed that high-resolution capture could in many respects rival 35mm film while harboring its own artistic possibilities. Fincher continued to push digital filmmaking in 2014, when *Gone Girl* became the first commercial feature to be shot in 6K. This larger format is 6,144 by 3,160 pixels in size, yielding 2.2 times as many pixels as 4K.

Most professional cameras have two big advantages over lower-cost models. They employ minimal data compression, and they tend to have larger sensors, ones about the same size as a frame of 35mm film. Both factors make for higher image quality. But consumer and "prosumer" cameras have also found roles in professional production. Filmmakers working on low budgets have discovered that not only dedicated video cameras but digital single-lens reflex still cameras (DSLRs) can yield high-quality video imagery. Stop-motion films made with puppets or clay figures often use DSLRs rather than exposing single frames with motion picture cameras. Even some cellphone cameras have the capacity for 1080p recording. Park Chan-wook, the Korean director of *Oldboy*, shot a prize-winning short film on his iPhone. These paraprofessional tools have proved particularly valuable for documentary filmmakers, who need to shoot hours of footage cheaply.

Digital Projection For some years, films shot on digital video were transferred to photographic film and sent to theaters as 35mm prints. After rather slow growth, digital projection exploded in 2010–2011 and by 2013 had almost entirely replaced 35mm projection in most commercial venues around the world.

Digital theatrical projection is usually in either the 2K or 4K format. The most common projection hardware employs microscopic mirrors and is manufactured in various designs by several companies. Running speeds are standardized at 24 fps and 48 fps. The film is encoded as a Digital Cinema Package (DCP), a set of files containing images, sound, subtitles, and other information. The DCP, delivered on a hard drive and heavily encrypted, provides a compressed version of the film (1.25). The DCP loads into a server that feeds one or more projectors in a theater complex (1.26).



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We survey the development of digital projection in our series "Pandora's digital box."



1.25



1.26

1.25–1.26 Digital theatrical projection. Films are shipped to theaters on hard drives (1.25). Figure 1.26 shows a Sony digital projection system. The projector is run from a server that stores films and trailer files loaded from the Digital Cinema Package. The touch-screen monitor on the left allows the operator to control the screening through a playlist. The dual lenses on the upper right are used for 3D screenings.

The new filmmaking and projection technology was given a boost by the resurgence of 3D films in the mid-2000s. Digital filming proved more reliable and efficient for stereoscopic movies, which were almost always projected digitally. (Imax retained some theaters that projected 3D on two strips of 70mm film.) James Cameron's colossal hit *Avatar* served as a showcase not just for 3D but for digital filmmaking in general.

Whether shooting on film or on video, the filmmaker faces comparable artistic choices. Now that we have a sense of the technical tools available, we can turn to the ways filmmakers work with them.

Making the Movie: Film Production

Important as technology is, films are part of social institutions as well. Sometimes the social context is intimate, as when a family records their lives to show friends and relations. But films that aim at the public enter a wider range of institutions.

A movie typically goes through three phases: *production*, *distribution*, and *exhibition*. An individual, group, or company makes the film. A distribution company rents copies to theater chains, and theaters exhibit the film. Later, DVD and Blu-ray versions are distributed to chain stores or rental shops; and the movie is then exhibited on TV monitors, computer screens, or portable displays. For video on demand, streaming, and websites such as YouTube, the Internet serves as both a distribution and an exhibition medium.

The whole system depends on having movies to circulate, so let's start by considering the process of production. Most films go through four distinct phases:

1. *Scriptwriting and funding*. The idea for the film is developed and a screenplay is written. The filmmakers also acquire financial support for the project.
2. *Preparation for filming*. Once a script is more or less complete and at least some funding is assured, the filmmakers plan the physical production.
3. *Shooting*. The filmmakers create the film's images and sounds.
4. *Assembly*. The images and sounds are combined in their final form. This involves cutting picture and sound, executing special effects, inserting music or extra dialogue, and adding titles.

The phases can overlap. Filmmakers may be scrambling for funding while shooting and assembling the film, and some assembly is usually taking place during filming. In addition, each stage modifies what went before. The idea for the film may be radically altered when the script is hammered out; the script's presentation of the action may be drastically changed in shooting; and the material that is shot takes on new significance in the process of assembly. As the French director Robert Bresson puts it: "A film is born in my head and I kill it on paper. It is brought back to life by the actors and then killed in the camera. It is then resurrected into a third and final life in the editing room where the dismembered pieces are assembled into their finished form."

These four phases include many particular jobs. Most theatrical releases result from dozens of specialized tasks carried out by hundreds of experts. This fine-grained division of labor has proved a reliable way to prepare, shoot, and assemble large-budget movies. On smaller productions, individuals perform several roles. A director might also edit the film, or the principal sound recordist on the set might also oversee the sound mixing. For *Tarnation*, a memoir of growing up in a troubled family, Jonathan Caouette assembled 19 years worth of photographs, audiotape, home movies, and videotape. Some of the footage was filmed by his parents, and some by him as a boy. Caouette shot new scenes, edited everything on iMovie, mixed the sound, and transferred the result to digital video. In making this personal documentary, Caouette executed virtually all the phases of film production himself.

"We don't shy away from all-digital filmmakers. We just happen to really, really love film. With artists who are passionate about image making, you don't hear, 'I want to make film look like digital!' You hear, 'I want digital to look like film.'" —Paul Korver, head of the Cinelicious postproduction company, Hollywood



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The study of the film industry as a business was a major research focus at our university, the University of Wisconsin–Madison. We look back at the innovative work of our colleagues in "Industrial Strength."



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We discuss one producer who exerted an exceptional degree of control over his projects (*Gone with the Wind*, *Rebecca*, *Duel in the Sun*) in “A Dose of DOS: Trade secrets from David O. Selznick.”

“A screenplay bears somewhat the same relationship to a movie as the musical score does to a symphonic performance. There are people who can read a musical score and ‘hear’ the symphony—but no two directors will see the same images when they read a movie script. The two-dimensional patterns of colored light involved are far more complex than the one-dimensional thread of sound.”

—Arthur C. Clarke, co-screenwriter, 2001: *A Space Odyssey*



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We consider the art of the screenwriter in two entries: “JCC” and “Scriptography.” Other entries consider major screenwriter-directors: David Koepp (*Jurassic Park*, *Premium Rush*) in “David Koepp: Making the world movie-sized,” and Alexander Payne (*Sideways*, *Nebraska*) in “Alexander Payne’s vividly shot reality.”

The Scriptwriting and Funding Phase

Two roles are central in this phase: producer and screenwriter. The tasks of the *producer* are chiefly financial and organizational. This person may be an “independent” producer, unearthing film projects and trying to convince production companies or distributors to finance the film. Or the producer may work for a distribution company and generate ideas for films. A studio may also hire a producer to put together a particular package.

The producer nurses the project through the scriptwriting process, obtains financial support, and arranges to hire the personnel who will work on the film. During shooting and assembly, the producer usually acts as the liaison between the writer or director and the company that is financing the film. After the film is completed, the producer often has the task of arranging the distribution, promotion, and marketing of the film. The producer is usually responsible as well for paying back the money invested in the production.

A single producer may take on all these tasks, but in the contemporary American film industry, the producer’s work is further subdivided. The *executive producer* is often the person who arranges the financing for the project or obtains the literary rights. Once the production is underway, the *line producer* oversees the day-to-day activities of director, cast, and crew. The line producer is assisted by an *associate producer*, who acts as a liaison with laboratories or technical personnel.

The chief task of the *screenwriter* is to prepare the *screenplay* (or script). Sometimes the writer will compose an original screenplay and send it to an agent, who submits it to a production company. Or an experienced screenwriter meets with a producer in a “pitch session,” where the writer can propose ideas for scripts. The first scene of Robert Altman’s *The Player* mocks pitch sessions by showing screenwriters proposing strained ideas like “*Pretty Woman* meets *Out of Africa*.” Alternatively, the producer may have an idea and hire a screenwriter to develop it. This approach is common if the producer has bought the rights to a novel or play and wants to adapt it for the screen. Since 2004, a service called “The Black List” has featured promising scripts by both new and experienced writers. These have been voted as favorites by industry professionals and offered for perusal by potential financial backers. Of the 970 scripts chosen during the List’s first decade, 270 were produced, of which nearly 200 received Oscar nominations and wins. Titles included *Little Miss Sunshine*, *Inglourious Basterds*, and *Nebraska*. Thanks to the Internet, the Black List allows talented writers to bring their work to potential producers.

The screenplay usually goes through several stages. These include a *treatment*, a synopsis of the action; then one or more full-length scripts; and a final version, the *shooting script*. Extensive rewriting is common, and writers often must revise their work several times.

If the producer or director finds one writer’s screenplay unsatisfactory, other writers may be hired to revise it. Most Hollywood screenwriters earn their living by rewriting other writers’ scripts. As you can imagine, this often leads to conflicts about which writer or writers deserve onscreen credit for the film. In the American film industry, these disputes are adjudicated by the Screen Writers’ Guild.

Shooting scripts are constantly changed, too. Some directors allow actors to modify the dialogue, and problems on location or on a set may necessitate changes in the scene. In the assembly stage, script scenes that have been shot are often condensed, rearranged, or dropped entirely.

As the screenplay is being prepared, the producer is planning the film’s finances. This person has sought out a director and stars to make the package seem a promising investment. The producer must prepare a budget spelling out *above-the-line costs* (the costs of literary property, scriptwriter, director, and major cast) and *below-the-line costs* (the expenses allotted to the crew, secondary cast, the shooting and assembly phases, insurance, and publicity). The sum of above- and

below-the-line costs is called the *negative cost* (that is, the total cost of producing the film’s master negative).

Some films don’t follow a full-blown screenplay. Documentaries, for instance, are difficult to script fully in advance. In order to get funding, however, the projects typically require a summary or an outline, and some documentarists prefer to have a written plan even if they recognize that the film will evolve in the course of production. When compiling a documentary from existing footage, the filmmakers often write the final voice-over commentary after assembling most of the sequences.

The Preparation Phase

When funding is more or less secure and the script is solid enough to start filming, the filmmakers can prepare for the physical production. In commercial filmmaking, this stage of activity is called **preproduction**. The *director*, who may have come on board the project at an earlier point, plays a central role in this and later phases. The director coordinates the staff to create the film. Although the director’s authority isn’t absolute, he or she is usually considered the person most responsible for the final look and sound of the film.

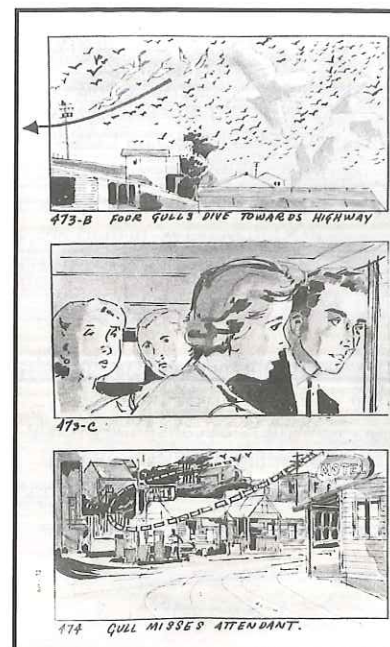
At this point, the producer and the director hire crew and cast the roles, and scout locations for filming. They also prepare a daily schedule for shooting. This is done with an eye on the budget. The producer assumes that the separate shots will be made “out of continuity”—that is, in the most convenient order for production—and put in proper order in the editing room. Since transporting equipment and personnel to a location is a major expense, producers usually prefer to shoot all the scenes taking place in one location at one time. For *Jurassic Park*, the main characters’ arrival on the island and their departure at the end of the film were both shot at the start of production, during the three weeks on location in Hawaii. A producer must also plan to shoot around actors who can’t be on the set every day. Many producers try to schedule the most difficult scenes early, before cast and crew begin to tire. The complex prizefight sequences of *Raging Bull* were filmed first, with the dialogue scenes shot later. Keeping all such contingencies in mind, the producer comes up with a schedule that juggles cast, crew, locations, and even seasons most efficiently.

During preproduction, several things are happening at the same time under the supervision of the director and producer. A writer may be revising the screenplay while a casting supervisor is searching out actors. In large-scale production, the director orchestrates the contributions of specialists in several units. He or she works with the *set unit*, or *production design unit*, headed by a *production designer*. The production designer is in charge of visualizing the film’s settings. This unit creates drawings and plans that determine the architecture and the color schemes of the sets. Under the production designer’s supervision, an *art director* oversees the construction and painting of the sets. The *set decorator*, often someone with experience in interior decoration, modifies the sets for specific filming purposes, supervising workers who find props and a *set dresser* who arranges things on the set during shooting. The *costume designer* is in charge of planning and executing the wardrobe for the production.

Working with the production designer, a *graphic artist* may be assigned to produce a **storyboard**, a series of comic strip-like sketches of the shots in each scene, including notations about costume, lighting, and camera work (1.27). Most directors do not demand a storyboard for every scene, but action sequences and shots using special effects or complicated camera work tend to be storyboarded in detail. The storyboard gives the cinematography unit and the special-effects unit a preliminary sense of what the finished shots should look like. The storyboard images may be filmed, cut together, and played with sound to help visualize the scene. This is one form of *animatics*.

Computer graphics can take planning further. The process of *previsualization*, or “previs,” reworks the storyboards into three-dimensional animation, complete

“Many, many novelists fail when they try to become screenwriters because they really believe writing for film is writing. It’s not. Writing for a film is filming.”
 —Jean-Claude Carrière, screenwriter



1.27



1.28

1.27–1.28 Planning the movie visually. A page from the storyboard for Hitchcock's *The Birds* (1.27). Simple computer-animated previsualization from *Pacific Rim* (1.28).

with moving figures, dialogue, sound effects, and music. Contemporary software can create settings and characters reasonably close to what will be filmed, and textures and shading can be added. Previsualization animatics are most often used to plan complicated action scenes or special effects (1.28), but they can also help the director to test options for staging scenes, moving cameras, and timing sequences. A substantial previs, complete with a temporary sound track, was made for *The Last Airbender*. Cinematographer Andrew Lesnie suggests how widely it was used from preplanning to postproduction: “It proved invaluable to the visual-effect, special-effects, stunt, lighting, production and art departments, and made the whole production a lot more cost efficient.”

Sometimes storyboards or short previs films are made before the preproduction begins, to find financial backing. Director Angelina Jolie created homemade storyboards for *Unbroken* and successfully used them to pitch the film to Universal.

The Shooting Phase

Although the term “production” refers to the entire process of making a film, Hollywood filmmakers also use it to refer to the *shooting phase*. Shooting is also known as *principal photography*.

Units and Personnel During shooting, the director supervises what is called the *director's crew*, consisting of these personnel:

- The *script supervisor*, known in the classic studio era as a “script girl.” (Today one-fifth of Hollywood script supervisors are male.) The script supervisor is in charge of all details of *continuity* from shot to shot. The supervisor checks details of performers' appearances (in the last scene, was the character's coat buttoned or not), props, lighting, movement, camera position, and the running time of each shot.
- The *first assistant director (AD)*, a jack-of-all-trades who, with the director, plans each day's shooting schedule. The AD sets up each shot for the director's approval while keeping track of the actors, monitoring safety conditions, and keeping the energy level high.

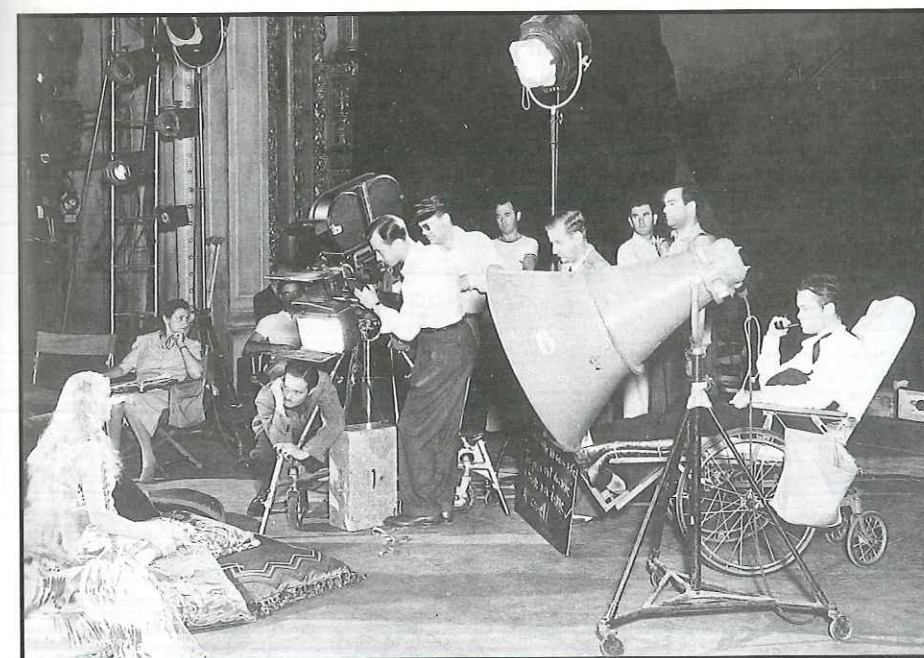
- The *second assistant director*, who is the liaison among the first AD, the camera crew, and the electricians' crew.
- The *third assistant director*, who serves as messenger for director and staff.
- The *dialogue coach*, who feeds performers their lines and speaks the lines of offscreen characters during shots of other performers.
- The *second unit director*, who films stunts, location footage, action scenes, and the like at a distance from where principal shooting is taking place.

The most visible group of workers is the *cast*. The cast may include *stars*—well-known players assigned to major roles and likely to attract audiences. The cast also includes *supporting players*, or performers in secondary roles; *minor players*; and *extras*, those anonymous persons who pass by in the street and occupy distant desks in large office sets. One of the director's major jobs is to elicit performances from the cast. The first AD usually works with the extras and takes charge of arranging crowd scenes.

On some productions, there are still more specialized roles. *Stunt artists* are supervised by a *stunt coordinator*; professional dancers work with a *choreographer*. If animals join the cast, they are handled by a *wrangler*. There have been pig wranglers (*Mad Max Beyond Thunder Dome*), snake wranglers (*Raiders of the Lost Ark*), and spider wranglers (*Arachnophobia*).

Another unit of specialized labor is the *photography unit*. The leader is the *cinematographer*, also known as the *director of photography* (or *DP*). The cinematographer is an expert on photographic processes, lighting, and camera technique. We have already seen how important Michael Mann's two DPs, Dion Beebe and Paul Cameron, were in achieving the desired look for *Collateral* (pp. 5–6). The cinematographer consults with the director on how each scene will be lit and filmed (1.29). The cinematographer supervises these workers:

- The *camera operator*, who runs the machine and who may also have assistants to load the camera, adjust and follow focus, push a dolly, and so on.



1.29 Shooting phase of production. On the set of *Citizen Kane*, Orson Welles directs from his wheelchair on the far right, cinematographer Gregg Toland crouches below the camera, and actress Dorothy Comingore kneels at the left. The script supervisor is seated in the left background.

“If you wander unbidden onto a set, you'll always know the AD because he or she is the one who'll probably throw you off. That's the AD yelling, ‘Places!’ ‘Quiet on the set!’ ‘Lunch—one-half hour!’ and ‘That's a wrap, people!’ It's all very ritualistic, like reveille and taps on a military base, at once grating and oddly comforting.”

—Christine Vachon, independent producer, on assistant directors

- The *key grip*, who supervises the *grips*. These workers carry and arrange equipment, props, and elements of the setting and lighting.
- The *gaffer*, the head electrician who supervises the placement and rigging of the lights.

Parallel to the photography unit is the *sound unit*. This is headed by the *production recordist* (also called the *sound mixer*). The recordist's principal responsibility is to record dialogue during shooting. Typically, the recordist uses a tape or digital recorder, several sorts of microphones, and a console to balance and combine the inputs. The recordist also tries to capture some ambient sound when no actors are speaking. These bits of room tone are later inserted to fill pauses in the dialogue. The recordist's staff includes:

- The *boom operator*, who manipulates the boom microphone and conceals radio microphones on the actors.
- The *third man*, who places other microphones, lays sound cables and is in charge of controlling ambient sound.

Some productions also have a *sound designer*, who enters the process during the preparation phase and who plans a sonic style appropriate for the entire film.

A *visual-effects unit*, overseen by the *visual-effects supervisor*, is charged with preparing and executing process shots, miniatures, matte work, computer-generated graphics, and other technical shots (1.30). During the planning phase, the director and the production designer have determined what effects are needed, and the supervisor consults with the director and the cinematographer on an ongoing basis. The visual-effects unit can number hundreds of workers, from puppet- and model-makers to specialists in digital compositing. On effects-heavy films, work is usually turned over to specialist firms.

A miscellaneous unit includes a *makeup staff*, a *costume staff*, *hairstylists*, and *drivers*, who transport cast and crew. During shooting, the producer is represented by a unit called the *producer's crew*. Central here is the *line producer*, who manages daily organizational business, such as arranging for meals and accommodations. A *production accountant* (or *production auditor*) monitors expenditures, a *production secretary* coordinates telephone communications among units and with the producer, and *production assistants* (or *PAs*) run errands. Newcomers to the film industry often start out working as production assistants.



1.30 Creating special effects. Sculpting a model dinosaur for *The Lost World: Jurassic Park*. The model was scanned into a computer for digital manipulation.

Scenes and Takes All this coordinated effort results in many hours of footage and recorded sound. For each shot called for in the script or storyboard, the director usually does several *takes*, or versions. For instance, if the finished film requires one shot of an actor saying a line, the director may do several takes of that speech, each time asking the actor to vary the delivery. Only one take, or even one part of the take, becomes the shot included in the finished film. Left-over footage can be used in coming-attractions trailers and electronic press kits.

Because scenes seldom are filmed in plot order, the director and the crew must have some way of labeling each take. As soon as the camera starts, one of the cinematographer's staff holds up a *clapperboard* before the lens. On the clapperboard are written the production, scene, shot, and take. A hinged arm at the top, the clapboard, makes a sharp clack that allows the recordist to synchronize the sound track

with the footage in the assembly phase (1.31). Thus every take is identified for future reference.

In filming a scene, most directors and technicians follow an organized procedure. While crews set up the lighting and test the sound recording, the director rehearses the actors and instructs the cinematographer. The director then usually supervises the filming of a *master shot*. The master shot typically records the entire action and dialogue of the scene. There may be several takes of the master shot. Then portions of the scene are restaged and shot in closer views or from different angles. These shots are called *coverage*, and each one may require many takes. Today most directors shoot a great deal of coverage. The script supervisor checks to ensure that details are consistent within all these shots.

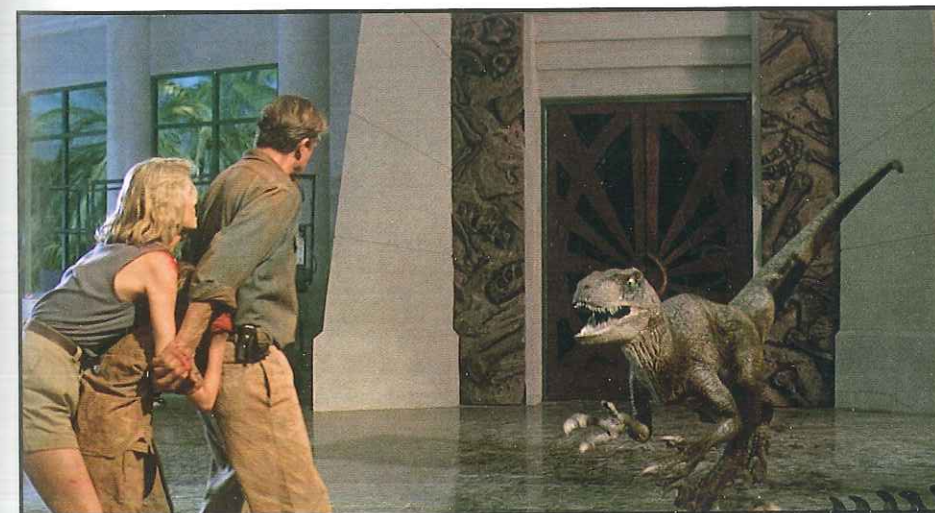
For most of film history, scenes were shot with a single camera, which was moved to different points for different setups. More recently, under pressure to finish principal photography as quickly as possible, the director and the camera unit often use two or more cameras, even for routine coverage. Action scenes like the taxi smashup in *Collateral* are usually shot from several angles simultaneously, because chases, crashes, and explosions are difficult to repeat for retakes. The battle scenes in *Gladiator* were filmed by 7 cameras, while 13 cameras were used for stunts in *XXX*.

For dialogue scenes, a common tactic is to film with an A camera and a B camera, an arrangement that can capture two actors in alternating shots. Still, some directors prefer the single-camera method. The camera assistant on Quentin Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds* sums up the artistic advantages: "You get such a hand-crafted movie. The actors know they're going to do a lot of setups because it's only one camera, but they get to perfect their craft. The camera rolls for as many takes as necessary to perfect each shot."

When special effects are to be included, the shooting phase must carefully plan for them. In many cases, actors will be filmed against blue or green backgrounds so that their figures can be inserted into computer-created settings. Or the director may film performers with the understanding that other material will be composited into the frame (1.32). If a moving person or animal needs to be created by computer, a specialized unit will use *motion capture*. Here small sensors are attached all over the body of the subject, and as that subject moves against a blank background or a set,



1.31 Labeling takes. A clapperboard on a set of *Argo* features an electronic time readout and an erasable acrylic board for information on the scene, camera roll, and take. The title and the names of the director and cinematographer have been permanently printed on the board, with the date applied with tape at the bottom.



1.32 Combining actors and special effects. For the climax of *Jurassic Park*, the actors were shot in the set of the visitor's center, but the velociraptors and the *Tyrannosaurus rex* were computer-generated images added later.



1.33



1.34

1.33–1.34 Motion capture. For *Iron Man*, Robert Downey Jr. performed in a motion-capture suit covered with sensors (1.33). The same scene with a computer-animated suit partially added (1.34).

a special camera records the movement (1.33, 1.34). Each sensor provides a point in a wire-frame figure on a computer. That image can then be animated and built up to a completely rendered person or animal to be inserted digitally into the film.

The Assembly Phase

Filmmakers call the assembly phase **postproduction**. Yet this phase doesn't begin after the shooting is finished. Typically, postproduction staff members work behind the scenes throughout shooting. Since the advent of digital postproduction tools, many filmmakers prefer to start editing, sound mixing, special effects, and other important tasks immediately after the first footage is shot.

Picture Editing Before the shooting begins, the director or producer probably hires an *editor* (also known as the *supervising editor*). This person catalogues and assembles the takes produced during shooting. The editor also works with the director to make creative decisions about how the footage can best be cut together.



A CLOSER LOOK

Some Terms and Roles in Film Production

The rise of packaged productions, the use of freelance workers, and other factors have led producers to credit everyone who worked on a film. Meanwhile, the specialization of large-scale filmmaking has created its own jargon. We have explained some of the most colorful terms in the text. Here are some other terms that you may see in a film's credits.

ACE: After the name of the editor; abbreviation for the American Cinema Editors, a professional association.

ASC: After the name of the director of photography; abbreviation for the American Society of Cinematographers, a professional association. The British equivalent is the BSC.

Additional photography: Crew shooting footage apart from the *principal photography*, typically supervised by the director of photography.

Best boy: Term from the classic studio years, originally applied to the gaffer's assistant. Today film credits may list both a *best boy electric* and a *best boy grip*, the assistant to the key grip.

Casting director: Member who searches for and auditions performers for the film, and suggests actors for *leading roles* (principal characters) and *character parts* (fairly standardized or stereotyped roles). She or he may also cast *extras* (background or nonspeaking roles).

Clapper boy: Crew member who operates the clapperboard that identifies each take.

Concept artist: Designer who creates illustrations of the settings and costumes that the director has in mind for the film.

Dialogue editor: Sound editor specializing in making sure recorded speech is audible.

Digital colorist: In postproduction, the colorist works on a digital copy of the film, manipulating the color, light levels, and other pictorial aspects. The colorist creates a consistent look for all the shots in a scene, corrects mistakes made in shooting, and makes shots more visually appealing.

Digital imaging technician: A specialist who advises on the choice of camera and other digital equipment, calibrates monitors during shooting, downloads and checks image files, and ensures that the postproduction workflow proceeds smoothly.

Dolly grip: Crew member who pushes the dolly that carries the camera, either from one setup to another or during a take for moving camera shots.

Foley artist: Sound-effects specialist who creates sounds of movement by walking or by shifting materials across large trays of different substances (sand, earth, glass, for example). Named for Jack Foley, a pioneer in postproduction sound.

Greenery man: Crew member who chooses and maintains trees, shrubs, and grass in settings.

Lead man: Member of set crew responsible for tracking down various props and items of decor.

Loader: On a production using film, this person inserts and unloads the camera magazines, keeps a log of shots taken, labels the cans of film, and sends them to the laboratory. A digital loader works alongside the digital imaging technician, putting the memory cards or drives in the camera, inventorying the contents of the recording media, and backing up the image files.

Matte artist: Member of special-effects unit who paints backdrops that are then photographically or digitally incorporated into a shot to indicate a setting.

Model maker: (1) Member of production design unit who prepares architectural models for sets to be built. (2) Member of the special-effects unit who fabricates scale models of locales, vehicles, or characters to be filmed or scanned as substitutes for full-size ones.

Property master: Member of set crew who supervises the use of all props, or movable objects in the film.

Publicist, unit publicist: Member of producer's crew who creates promotional material regarding the production. The publicist may arrange for press and television interviews with the director and cast and for coverage of the production in the mass media.

Scenic artist: Member of set crew responsible for painting surfaces of set.

Still photographer: Member of crew who takes photographs of scenes and behind-the-scenes shots of cast members and others. These photographs may be used to check lighting or set design or color, and some will be used in publicizing the film.

Video assist: A video camera attached to the motion picture camera that allows immediate playback of a shot. This allows the director and cinematographer to check lighting, framing, or performances.

“A couple of guys in a coffee shop set out to write a gag; a couple of guys with a camera set out to film a gag; a couple of guys in an editing room set out to make sense of the trash that’s been dumped on their desks.”

—David Mamet, director, *The Spanish Prisoner* and *Redbelt*

Because each shot usually exists in several takes, because the film is shot out of plot order, and because the master-shot/coverage approach yields so much footage, the editor’s job can be a daunting one. A 100-minute feature, which amounts to about 9,000 feet of 35mm film, may have been carved out of 500,000 feet of raw footage. Shooting on video can also generate a huge amount of material to be edited. Over 286 hours of footage were sent to postproduction for *The Social Network*. For this reason, postproduction on major Hollywood pictures often takes up to seven months. Sometimes several editors and assistants are brought in.

Typically, the editor receives filmed material as quickly as possible. This footage is known as the *dailies* or the *rushes*. The editor inspects the dailies, leaving it to the *assistant editor* to synchronize image and sound and to sort the takes by scene. The editor meets with the director to examine the dailies, or if the production is filming far away, the editor informs the director of how the footage looks. Since retaking shots is costly and troublesome, constant checking of the dailies is important for spotting any problems with focus, exposure, framing, or other visual factors. From the dailies, the director selects the best takes, and the editor records the choices. To save money, “digital dailies” are often shown to the producer and director, but since video playback on small monitors can conceal defects in the original footage, many editors prefer to check the shots on a big screen before.

As the footage accumulates, the editor assembles it into a *rough cut*—the shots loosely strung in sequence, without sound effects or music. Rough cuts tend to run long—the rough cut for *Apocalypse Now* ran 7½ hours. From the rough cut, the editor, in consultation with the director, builds toward a *fine cut* or *final cut*. The unused shots constitute the *outtakes*. While the final cut is being prepared, a *second unit* may be shooting *inserts*, footage to fill in at certain places. These are typically long shots of cities or airports or close-ups of objects. At this point, *pickups* are also shot. These are retakes and additional footage not made during principal photography. Then, titles are prepared, and further laboratory work or special-effects work may be done.

Until the mid-1980s, editors cut and spliced the *work print*, footage printed from the camera negative. In trying out their options, editors were obliged to rearrange the shots physically. Now virtually all commercial films are edited digitally. Any footage shot on film is transferred to a hard drive. The editor enters notes on each take directly into a computer database. From these, the editor can call up any shot, join it to another shot, trim it, or junk it. Special effects and music can be tried out as well.

As the editing team puts the footage in order, other members of the team manipulate the look of the shots via computer. If the footage has been shot on film, it may be scanned frame by frame into computer files to create a *digital intermediate* (DI). The DI is manipulated in many ways, most importantly to change light levels and to alter colors. The purpose is to make sure that shots made at different times of day or in different locales can be cut together to create a consistent look throughout a scene. Such tasks are handled by *digital color grading*, and the job is done by the *colorist*. To some extent the colorist takes over tasks that a cinematographer and traditional grader would originally have performed in the photographic laboratory, and the two may work together on the DI. Nowadays if a problem arises on set, the filming continues, with the crew deciding, “we’ll fix it in post.” As we’ll see in Chapter 5, digital tools can make precise changes in portions of the image.

Ironically, the use of digital intermediates has encouraged some filmmakers to continue working on 35mm photographic film stock. They believe that they can best exploit the visual richness of film by digital manipulation. Jacques Audiard’s *A Prophet* was shot on 35mm, but after transfer to a DI it was shown at the Cannes Film Festival as a 2K version. Audiard was thrilled with the way it looked on the screen: “It’s a miraculous hybrid that magnifies the beauty of 35mm.” Several directors and cinematographers share Audiard’s enthusiasm for this “hybrid” approach.



1.35 Computer-generated imagery. In the chase through the airways of Coruscant in *Attack of the Clones*, the actor was shot against a blue or green screen, and the backgrounds and moving vehicles were created through CGI.

Special Effects For special effects, filmmakers turn to computer-generated imagery (CGI). Their tasks may be as simple as deleting distracting background elements or building a crowd out of a few spectators. George Lucas has claimed that if an actor blinked at the wrong time, he just erased the blink digitally. CGI can also create imagery that would be virtually impossible with photographic film (1.35). Computers can conjure up photorealistic characters such as Gollum in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. (See pp. 165–166.) Fantasy and science fiction have fostered the development of CGI, but all genres have benefited, from the comic multiplication of a single actor in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* to the grisly realism of the digitally enhanced Omaha Beach assault in *Saving Private Ryan*. In *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*, CGI substituted for makeup, allowing Brad Pitt and Cate Blanchett to plausibly portray their characters through youth to old age.

Sound Editing Once the shots are arranged in something approaching final form, the *sound editor* takes charge of building up the sound track. The director, the composer, the picture editor, and the sound editor view the film and agree on where music and effects will be placed, a process known as *spotting*. The sound editor may have a staff whose members specialize in mixing dialogue, music, or sound effects.

Surprisingly little of the sound recorded during filming winds up in the finished movie. Often half or more of the dialogue is rerecorded in postproduction, using a process known as *automated dialogue replacement* (ADR). ADR usually yields better quality than location sound does. With the on-set recording serving as a *guide track*, the sound editor records actors in the studio speaking their lines (called *dubbing* or *looping*). Nonsynchronized dialogue such as the babble of a crowd (known in Hollywood as “walla”) is added by ADR as well.

Similarly, very few of the noises we hear in a film were recorded during filming. A sound editor adds sound effects, drawing on a library of stock sounds or creating particular effects for the film. Sound editors routinely manufacture footsteps, car crashes, pistol shots, and fists thudding into flesh (often produced by whacking a watermelon with an axe). In *Terminator 2*, the sound of the T-1000 cyborg passing through jail cell bars is that of dog food sliding slowly out of a can. Sound-effects technicians have sensitive hearing. One veteran noted the differences among doors: “The bathroom door has a little air as opposed to the closet door. The front door has to sound solid; you have to hear the latch sound. . . . Don’t just put in any door, make sure it’s right.”

Like picture editing, modern sound editing relies on computer technology. The editor can store recorded sounds in a database, classifying and rearranging them in

“[ADR for *Apocalypse Now*] was tremendously wearing on the actors because the entire film is looped, and of course all of the sound for everything had to be redone. So the actors were locked in a room for days and days on end shouting. Either they’re shouting over the noise of the helicopter, or they’re shouting over the noise of the boat.”

—Walter Murch, sound designer

any way desired. A sound's qualities can be modified digitally—clipping off high or low frequencies and changing pitch, reverberation, equalization, or speed. The boom and throb of underwater action in *The Hunt for Red October* were slowed down and reprocessed from such mundane sources as a diver plunging into a swimming pool, water bubbling from a garden hose, and the hum of Disneyland's air-conditioning plant. One technician on the film called digital sound editing “sound sculpting.”

During the spotting of the sound track, the film's *composer* enters the assembly phase as well. The composer compiles cue sheets that mark exactly where the music will go and how long it should run. The composer writes the score, although she or he will probably not orchestrate it personally. While the composer is working, the rough cut is synchronized with a *temp dub*—accompaniment pulled from recorded songs or classical pieces. Musicians record the score with the aid of a *click track*, a taped series of metronome beats synchronized with the final cut.

Dialogue, effects, and music are recorded on separate tracks, and each type of sound, however minor, will occupy a separate track. During the mixing, for each scene, the image track is run over, once for each sound, to ensure proper synchronization. The specialist who performs the task is the *rerecording mixer*, usually supervising a team of mixers. Each scene may involve dozens of tracks of individual sounds, which are all mixed together. Equalization, filtering, and other adjustment take place at this stage. The director typically oversees some mixing sessions, particularly the one creating the final mix.

In the era of photochemical filmmaking, the *camera negative*, which was the source of the dailies and the work print, was too precious to serve as the source for final prints. Traditionally, from the negative footage, the laboratory drew an *interpositive*, which in turn provided an *internegative*. The internegative was then assembled in accordance with the final cut, and it served as the primary source of future prints. An alternative, as we've seen, was to create a digital intermediate that could be recorded back to film as an internegative.

Once the internegative was created, the master sound track was synchronized with it. The first positive print, complete with picture and sound, was called the *answer print*. After the director, producer, and cinematographer approved an answer print, *release prints* were made for distribution. Using a digital intermediate made it possible to generate additional internegatives as old ones wore out, all without any damage to the original materials.

Films that are shot digitally may proceed through postproduction without ever being put on photochemical stock. The director and cinematographer approve a master version that will be converted to the Digital Cinema Packages released to theaters. Further conversions will turn out video versions for DVD and Blu-ray, streaming, and other platforms. These transfers often demand new judgments about color quality and sound balance. The master version of the finished film, along with all the footage and materials used in the creation of the movie, will be stored on files. Because digital media have a short life, most film studios arrange for the finished film and the most valuable supplementary footage to be saved on 35mm film as well.

Special Versions The work of production does not end when the final theatrical version has been assembled. In consultation with the producer and director, the postproduction staff prepares airline and broadcast television versions. For a successful film, a director's cut or an extended edition may be released on disc. Different versions may be prepared for different countries. European prints of Stanley Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut* featured more nudity than did American ones, in which some naked couples were blocked by digital figures added to the foreground.

Many fictional films have dramatized processes of film production. Federico Fellini's *8½* concerns itself with the preproduction stage of a film that is abandoned before shooting starts. François Truffaut's *Day for Night*, David Mamet's *State and*

Main, Christopher Guest's *For Your Consideration*, and Tom DiCillo's *Living in Oblivion* all center on the shooting phase. The action of Brian De Palma's *Blow Out* occurs while a low-budget thriller is in sound editing. *Singin' in the Rain* follows a single film through the entire process, with a gigantic advertising billboard filling the final shot.

Artistic Implications of the Production Process

Every artist works within constraints of time, money, and opportunity. Of all the arts, filmmaking is one of the most pressurized. Budgets must be maintained, deadlines must be met, weather and locations are unpredictable, and the coordination of any group of people involves unforeseeable twists and turns. Even a Hollywood blockbuster, which might seem to offer unlimited freedom, is actually confining on many levels. Big-budget filmmakers sometimes get tired of coordinating hundreds of staff and wrestling with million-dollar decisions, and they start to long for more relaxed productions. Steven Soderbergh has swung between high-profile projects like the star-packed *Ocean's 11* franchise and smaller projects like *Bubble*, shot with nonprofessional actors on 1080p HD.

We appreciate films more when we realize that in production, every film is a compromise made within constraints. When Mark and Michael Polish conceived their independent film *Twin Falls Idaho*, they had planned for the story to unfold in several countries. But the cost of travel and location shooting forced them to rethink the film's plot: “We had to decide whether the film was about twins or travel.”

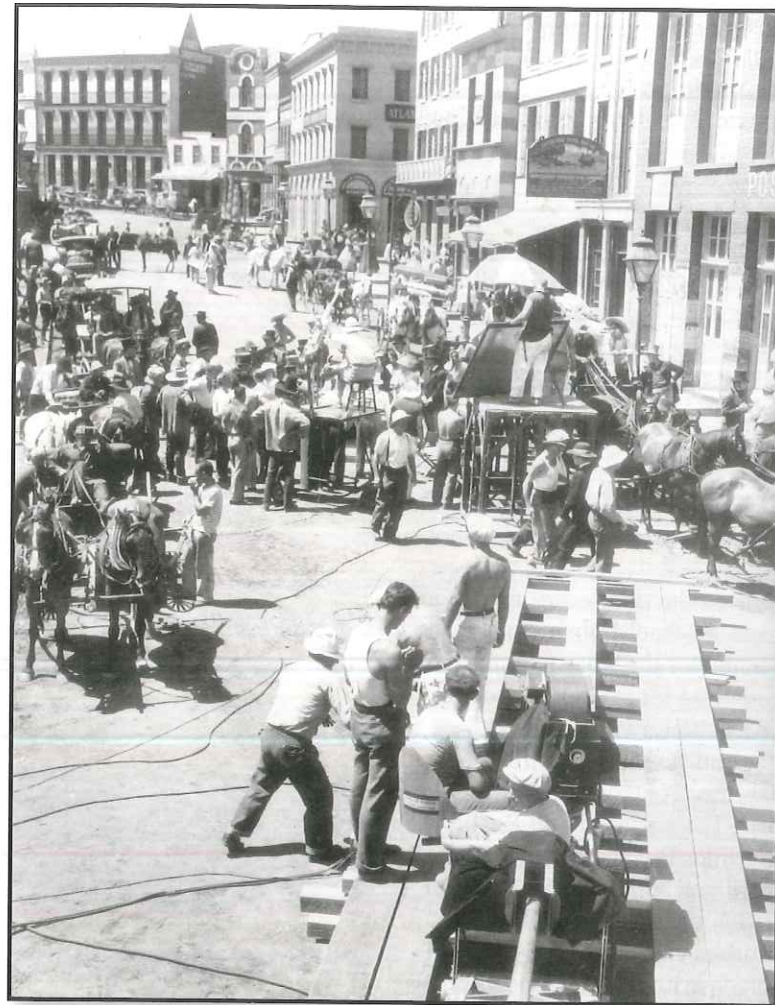
Similarly, the involvement of a powerful director can reshape the film at the screenplay stage. In the original screenplay of *Witness*, the protagonist was Rachel, the Amish widow with whom John Book falls in love. The romance and Rachel's confused feelings about Book formed the central plot line. But the director, Peter Weir, wanted to emphasize the clash between pacifism and violence. So William Kelley and Earl Wallace revised their screenplay to stress the mystery plot line and to center the action on Book and the introduction of urban crime into the peaceful Amish community. Given the new constraints, the screenwriters found a new form for *Witness*.

Some filmmakers struggle against their constraints, pushing the limits of what's considered possible. The production of a film we'll study in upcoming chapters, *Citizen Kane*, was highly innovative on many fronts. Yet even this project had to accept studio routines and the limits of current technology. More commonly, a filmmaker works with the same menu of choices available to others. In directing *Collateral*, Michael Mann made creative choices about how to use digital cameras and low lighting levels. Other filmmakers working in 2004 could have taken the same risks, but Mann saw new ways of employing such techniques. The overall result was a visual style that no other film had achieved, though others imitated it.

Starting our study of film art with a survey of production allows us to understand some of the possibilities offered by images and sounds. It also helps put us in the filmmaker's shoes: We can see the decisions from the inside. We realize that everything in the finished movie springs from choices that we too would face. Later chapters will discuss the artistic consequences of decisions made in production—everything from storytelling strategies to techniques of staging, shooting, editing, and sound work. By choosing within production constraints, and sometimes pushing against them, filmmakers create film form and style.

Modes of Production

The scale and type of production varies from large-scale studio filmmaking involving hundreds of people to do-it-yourself productions completed by a single filmmaker. The different modes of production shape the final film.



1.36 Large-scale production. Studio production was characterized by a large number of highly specialized production roles. Here several units prepare a moving-camera shot for *Wells Fargo* (1937).

Large-Scale Production

The fine-grained division of labor we've been describing is characteristic of *studio* filmmaking. A studio is a company in the business of creating films. The most famous studios flourished in Hollywood from the 1920s to the 1960s—Paramount, Warner Bros., Columbia, and so on. These companies owned equipment and extensive physical plants, and they retained most of their workers on long-term contracts. Each studio's central management planned all projects, then delegated authority to supervising producers, who in turn assembled casts and crews from the studio's pool of workers.

Organized as efficient businesses, the studios created a tradition of carefully tracking the entire process through paper records. At the start, there were versions of the script. During shooting, reports were written about camera footage, sound recording, special-effects work, and laboratory results. In the assembly phase, there were logs of shots catalogued in editing and a variety of cue sheets for music, mixing, looping, and title layout. This sort of record keeping has remained a part of large-scale filmmaking, though now it is done mostly on computer.

Although studio production might seem to resemble a factory's assembly line, it was always more creative, collaborative, and chaotic than turning out cars or microchips. Each film is a unique product, not a replica of a prototype. In studio filmmaking, skilled specialists collaborated to create such a product while still adhering to a "blueprint" prepared by management (**1.36**).

The centralized production system has virtually disappeared. The giant studios of Hollywood's golden age have become distribution companies, although they may initiate, fund, and oversee the making of some of the films they distribute. The old studios had stars and staff under contract, so the same group of people might work together on film after film. Now each film is planned as a distinct package, with director, actors, staff, and technicians brought together for the project. The studio may provide its own sound stages, sets, and offices for the production, but in most cases, the producer arranges with outside firms to supply cameras, catering, locations, special effects, and anything else required.

In recent years, each phase of filmmaking has encompassed more and more specialized tasks. This trend is largely due to bigger budgets and greater reliance on digital special effects. Still, the basic production stages and division of labor remain similar to what they were in the years of classic studio moviemaking.

Exploitation, Independent Production, and DIY

Not all films using the division of labor we have outlined are big-budget projects financed by major companies. There are also low-budget *exploitation* products tailored to a particular market—in earlier decades, fringe theaters and drive-ins; now, video rentals and sales. Troma Films, maker of *The Toxic Avenger*, is probably the most

famous exploitation company, turning out horror movies and teen sex comedies for \$100,000 or less. Nonetheless, exploitation filmmakers usually divide the labor along studio lines. There is the producer's role, the director's role, and so on, and the production tasks are parceled out in ways that roughly conform to mass-production practices.

Exploitation production often forces people to double up on jobs. Robert Rodriguez made *El Mariachi* as an exploitation film for the Spanish-language video market. The 21-year-old director also functioned as producer, scriptwriter, cinematographer, camera operator, still photographer, and sound recordist and mixer. Rodriguez's friend Carlos Gallardo starred, coproduced, and coscripted; he also served as unit production manager and grip. Gallardo's mother fed the cast and crew. *El Mariachi* wound up costing only about \$7,000.

Unlike *El Mariachi*, most exploitation films don't enter the theatrical market, but other low-budget productions, loosely known as *independent* films, may. Independent films are made for the theatrical market but usually without major distributor financing. Some independent filmmakers are well known, such as Spike Lee, David Cronenberg, and Joel and Ethan Coen, who prefer to work with budgets significantly below the industry norm. In such cases, the director usually initiates the project and partners with a producer to get it realized. Financing may come from television firms, with major U.S. distributors buying the rights if the project seems to have good prospects. Or private investors may provide funding, as Megan Ellison has done for *Zero Dark Thirty*, *Spring Breakers*, and *American Hustle*.

As we would expect, these industry-based independents organize production in ways close to the full-fledged studio mode. Nonetheless, because these projects require less financing, the directors can demand more control over the production process. For *Slumdog Millionaire*, a relatively low-cost project, director Danny Boyle had the freedom to shoot some of the film on 35mm and other portions on smaller 2K digital cameras, which were easier to maneuver in the crowded streets of Mumbai.

The category of independent production is a roomy one, and it also includes more modest projects by less well-known filmmakers. Examples are Victor Nuñez's *Ulee's Gold*, Phil Morrison's *Junebug*, and Miranda July's *Me and You and Everyone We Know*. Even though they are far less costly than studio projects, independent productions face many obstacles. Filmmakers may have to finance the project themselves, with the help of relatives and friendly investors; they must also find a distributor specializing in independent and low-budget films. Festivals and networking are important for independent filmmakers. Ava DuVernay, who had started her career as a publicist, was inspired to become a director when working on *Collateral*. Her second low-budget feature, *Middle of Nowhere* (**1.37**), was shown at the Sundance Film Festival, and she became the first African-American woman to win its best-director prize. When there were problems finding a director for *Selma*, actor David Oyelowo, who had a leading role in *Middle of Nowhere*, suggested DuVernay. Her work on *Selma* led to an Academy Award nomination. DuVernay also founded the African-American Film Festival Releasing Movement to distribute independent work by black filmmakers. If you were an independent filmmaker, you might believe the advantages are worth the struggle. Independent production can treat subjects that large-scale studio production ignores. No film studios would probably have supported Kevin Smith's *Clerks* or Lena Dunham's *Tiny Furniture* or Richard Linklater's *Boyhood*. Because the independent film does not need as large an audience to repay its costs, it can be more personal and controversial. And the production process, no matter how low the budget, still relies on the basic roles and phases established by the studio tradition.

Small-Scale Production

In large-scale and independent production, many people work on the film, each one a specialist in a particular task. Even on *Boyhood*, which was a relatively small production, there were about 45 crew members on set each day. But there's also a tradition of a single filmmaker assuming all or many of the roles: planning the film,



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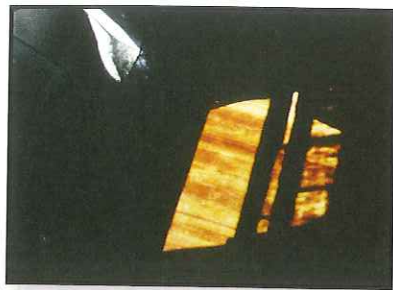
Studio films and independent ones aren't always that far apart, as we suggest in "Independent film: How different?"



1.37 The heroine of *Middle of Nowhere* puts her life on hold when her husband is imprisoned. The tedium of her long bus rides to visit him is suggested by several shots at intervals in the film.

“Deep down inside, everybody in the United States has a desperate need to believe that some day, if the breaks fall their way, they can quit their jobs as claims adjusters, legal secretaries, certified public accountants, or mobsters, and go out and make their own low-budget movie. Otherwise, the future is just too bleak.”

—Joe Queenan, critic and independent filmmaker



1.38 Small-scale production. In *The Riddle of Lumen*, Stan Brakhage turns shadows and everyday objects into vivid patterns.



1.39



1.40

1.39–1.40 Handmade movies. In *Meshes of the Afternoon*, multiple versions of the protagonist were played by the filmmaker, Maya Deren (1.39). For *Empire II*, Amos Poe digitally manipulated this tantalizing glimpse of the Manhattan skyline (1.40).



1.41 Small-scale documentary filmmaking. In *Harlan County, U.S.A.*, the driver of a passing truck fires at the film crew. Working organically within the community, the filmmakers were threatened with violence similar to that experienced by the striking coal miners they were filming.

financing it, performing in it, running the camera, recording the sound, and putting it all together. For his low-budget horror film *Monsters*, Gareth Edwards acted as writer, director, cinematographer, and special-effects supervisor. He did his own location scouting from his computer, using Google Earth to survey Mexico, Belize, and Guatemala.

Experimental and documentary traditions have given great weight to the film dominated by a single person's efforts. Consider Stan Brakhage, whose films are among the most directly personal ever made. Some, such as *Window Water Baby Moving*, are lyrical studies of his home and family (1.38). Others, such as *Dog Star Man*, are mythic treatments of nature; still others, such as *23rd Psalm Branch*, are quasi-documentary studies of war and death. Funded by grants and his personal finances, Brakhage prepared, shot, and edited his films virtually unaided. While he was working in a film laboratory, he also developed and printed his footage. With over 150 films to his credit, Brakhage proved that the individual filmmaker can become an artisan, executing all the basic production tasks.

The 16mm and less costly digital video formats are customary for small-scale production of this sort. Financial backing often comes from the filmmaker, from grants, and perhaps from obliging friends and relatives. There is very little division of labor: The filmmaker oversees every production task and performs many of them. Although technicians or performers may help out, the creative decisions rest with the filmmaker. Experimentalist Maya Deren's *Meshes of the Afternoon* was shot by her husband, Alexander Hammid, but she scripted, directed, and edited it and performed in the central role (1.39). Amos Poe made his lengthy, evocative experimental film *Empire II* by placing a small digital camera in a window of his Manhattan apartment and exposing single frames in bursts at intervals over an entire year (1.40). Poe edited the film himself, reworked the images digitally, and assembled the sound track from existing songs and original music.

Such small-scale production is common in documentary filmmaking as well. Jean Rouch, a French anthropologist, made several films alone or with a small crew in his efforts to record the lives of marginal people living in alien cultures. Rouch wrote, directed, and photographed *Les Maîtres fous* (1955), his first widely seen film. He examined the ceremonies of a Ghanaian cult whose members lived a double life: Most of the time they worked as low-paid laborers, but in their rituals, they passed into a frenzied trance and assumed the identities of their colonial rulers.

Similarly, Barbara Kopple devoted four years to making *Harlan County, U.S.A.*, a record of Kentucky coal miners' struggles for union representation. After eventually obtaining funding from several foundations, she and a small crew spent 13 months living with miners during the workers' strike. During filming, Kopple acted as sound recordist, working with cameraman Hart Perry and sometimes also a lighting person. A large crew was ruled out not only by Kopple's budget but also by the need to fit naturally into the community. Like the miners, the filmmakers were constantly threatened with violence from strikebreakers (1.41).

On rare occasions small-scale production becomes *collective* production. Here, instead of a single filmmaker shaping the project, several film workers participate equally. The group shares common goals and makes production decisions democratically. Roles may also be rotated: The sound recordist on one day may serve as cinematographer on the next. One instance is the Canadian film *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner*. Three Inuits (Zacharias Kunuk, Paul Apak Angilirq, and Paul Qulitalik) and one New Yorker (Norman Cohn) composed a screenplay based on an oral tale about love, murder, and revenge. Cast and crew spent six months shooting in the Arctic, camping in tents and eating seal meat. "We don't have a hierarchy," Cohn explained. "There's no director, second, third or fourth assistant director. We have a team of people trying to figure out how to

make this work." Because of the communal nature of Inuit life, the Igloodik team expanded the collective effort by bringing local people into the project. An early showcase for the strengths of digital video (1.42), *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner* won a prize at the 2002 Cannes Film Festival. YouTube and other media-sharing sites have popularized collective production by encouraging high school classes to make films together.

Small-scale production allows the filmmakers to retain tight control of the project. The rise of digital video formats has made small-scale production more visible. *The Gleaners and I* (see p. 174), *The Yes Men*, *Searching for Sugarman*, *The Cove*, *Anvil! The Story of Anvil*, *Citizenfour*, and other documentaries indicate that the theatrical market and festival circuit have room for works made by single filmmakers or small production units.

Thanks to digital cameras and affordable software for computer postproduction, there has been an explosion of "do it yourself" (DIY) filmmaking. Individuals or small groups of amateurs can make their own films and share them on YouTube, Vimeo, and other websites. An early instance was Arin Crumley and Susan Buice's *Four Eyed Monsters*, a filmed reenactment of the couple's unconventional romance that got some festival exposure before moving to a self-published DVD and YouTube. This project was an early example of crowdfunding before such resources as Indiegogo and Kickstarter existed.



1.42 Collective filmmaking. The hero of *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner* pauses in his flight across the ice. "We made our film in an Inuit way," Norman Cohn explained, "through consensus and collaboration."

Artistic Implications of Different Modes of Production

Production and Film Categories We sometimes categorize films on the basis of how they were made. We can distinguish a *fiction* film from a *documentary* on the basis of production phases.

The fiction film is characterized by much more control over the preparation and shooting phases. By contrast, the documentary filmmaker usually controls only certain portions of preparation, shooting, and assembly. Some stages (script and rehearsal) may be omitted, whereas others (setting, lighting, and performance) are present but often uncontrolled. In interviewing an eyewitness to an event, the filmmaker typically controls camera work and editing but does not tell the witness what to say or how to act. For example, there was no script for the documentary *Manufacturing Consent: Noam Chomsky and the Media*. Filmmakers Mark Achbar and Peter Wintonick instead shot long interviews in which Chomsky explained his ideas.

Similarly, a *compilation* film assembles existing images and sounds that provide historical evidence on a topic. The compilation filmmaker may minimize the shooting stage and create a story from archival footage. For *The Power of Nightmares*, Adam Curtis gathered newsreel and television footage, television commercials, and clips from fiction films to track the rise of fundamentalist politics and religion after World War II.

One more kind of film is distinguished by the way it's produced. The *animated* film is created frame by frame. Images may be drawn directly on the film strip, or the camera may photograph drawings or three-dimensional models, as in the *Wallace and Gromit* movies. *Corpse Bride* was created without using motion picture cameras; instead, each frame was registered by a digital still camera and transferred to film. Today most animated films, both for theater screens and for the Internet, are created directly on computer with imaging software.

“One of the best things about directing is that there's no confusion about who's to blame: You are.”

—Nora Ephron, director, *Julie & Julia*

Production and Authorship Production practices have another implication for film as an art form. Who, it is often asked, is the “author,” the person responsible for the film? In individual production, the author must be the solitary filmmaker—Stan Brakhage or perhaps you. Collective film production creates collective authorship: The author is the entire group. The question of authorship becomes difficult to answer only when asked about large-scale production, particularly in the studio mode.

Studio film production assigns tasks to so many individuals that it is often difficult to determine who controls or decides what. Is the producer the author? In the prime years of the Hollywood system, the producer might have had nothing to do with shooting. The writer? The writer’s script might be completely transformed in shooting and editing. So is this situation like collective production, with group authorship? No, because there is a hierarchy in which a few main players make the key decisions.

Moreover, if we consider not only control and decision making but also individual style, it seems certain that some studio workers leave recognizable and unique traces on the films they make. Cinematographers such as Gregg Toland, set designers such as Hermann Warm, costumers such as Edith Head, choreographers such as Gene Kelly—the contributions of these people stand out within the films they made. So where does the studio-produced film leave the idea of authorship?

Most people who study cinema regard the director as the film’s primary “author.” Although the writer prepares a screenplay, later phases of production can modify it beyond recognition. And although the producer monitors the entire process, he or she seldom controls moment-by-moment activity on the set. It is the director who makes the crucial decisions about performance, staging, lighting, framing, cutting, and sound. On the whole, the director usually has most control over how a movie looks and sounds.

This doesn’t mean that the director is an expert at every job or dictates every detail. The director can delegate tasks to trusted personnel, and directors often work habitually with certain actors, cinematographers, composers, and editors. In the days of studio filmmaking, directors learned how to blend the distinctive talents of cast and crew into the overall movie. Humphrey Bogart’s unique talents were used very differently by Michael Curtiz in *Casablanca*, John Huston in *The Maltese Falcon*, and Howard Hawks in *The Big Sleep*. Gregg Toland’s cinematography was pushed in different directions by Orson Welles (*Citizen Kane*) and William Wyler (*The Best Years of Our Lives*).

During the 1950s, young French critics applied the word *auteur* (author) to Hollywood directors who they felt had created a distinctive approach to filmmaking while working within the Hollywood studio system. Soon American critics picked up the “auteur theory,” which remained a central idea for film academics and students. Now you will occasionally read reviews or see spots on television that use the term to refer to a respected and distinctive director.

Today well-established directors can control large-scale production to a remarkable degree. Until 2011, Steven Spielberg resisted using digital editing. The late Robert Altman disliked ADR and used much of the casual on-set dialogue in the finished film. In the days of Hollywood’s studio system, some directors exercised power more indirectly. Most studios did not permit the director to supervise editing, but John Ford often made only one take of each shot. Precutting the film “in his head,” Ford virtually forced the editor to put the shots together as he had planned.

Around the world, the director is generally recognized as the key player. In Europe, Asia, and South America, directors frequently initiate the film and work closely with scriptwriters. In Hollywood, directors usually operate on a freelance basis, and the top ones select their own projects. To a great extent, it is the director who shapes the film’s unique form and style, and these two components are central to cinema as an art.

“The times when [our job] is most satisfying are when you really are in sync with the director. It is almost like you are trying to crawl into their brain, and it is about fulfilling their vision, which is what everybody’s role on a film is.”

—Ellen Lewis, casting director



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Screenwriters often take issue with the idea of directorial authorship, but we defend it in “Who the devil wrote it? (Apologies to Peter Bogdanovich.)”

Bringing the Film to the Audience: Distribution and Exhibition

We’ve spent some time considering film production because that’s where film art begins. What of the other two phases of filmmaking? As in production, money plays a significant role in both distribution and exhibition. We’ll see as well that these phases have effects on film art and viewers’ experiences of particular films.

Distribution: The Center of Power

Distribution companies form the core of economic power in the commercial film industry. Filmmakers need distributors to circulate their work; exhibitors need them to supply their screens. Europe and Asia are home to some significant media companies, but six Hollywood firms remain the world’s major distributors. You recognize the names: Warner Bros., Paramount, Walt Disney/Buena Vista, Universal, Sony/Columbia, and Twentieth Century Fox.

These firms provide mainstream entertainment to theaters around the world. The films they release account for 95 percent of ticket sales in the United States and Canada, and about half of the overseas market. In world capitals, the majors maintain branch offices that advertise films, schedule releases, and arrange for prints to be made in local languages (either dubbing dialogue or adding subtitles). With vigorous marketing units in every region, the majors can distribute non-U.S. films as well as Hollywood titles. For example, Hayao Miyazaki’s popular animated films (*Spirited Away*, *Howl’s Moving Castle*) are distributed on video by Disney’s Buena Vista arm, even in Miyazaki’s homeland of Japan.

The major distributors have won such power because large companies can best endure the risks of theatrical moviemaking. Filmmaking is costly, and most films don’t earn profits in theatrical release. Worldwide, the top 10 percent of all films released garner 50 percent of all box office receipts. The most popular 30 percent of films account for 80 percent of receipts. Distributors are in a position to move films smoothly from theatrical runs to cable TV, DVD, and other platforms. Typically, a film breaks even or shows a profit only after it has been released in these ancillary markets.

In the United States, theater owners bid for each film a distributor releases, and in most states, they must be allowed to see the film before bidding. Elsewhere in the world, distributors may force exhibitors to rent a film without seeing it (called *blind booking*), perhaps even before it has been completed. Exhibitors may also be pressured to rent a package of films in order to get a few desirable items (*block booking*).

Once the exhibitor has contracted to screen the film, the distributor can demand stiff terms. The theater keeps a surprisingly small percentage of total box office receipts (known as the *gross* or *grosses*). One standard U.S. arrangement guarantees the distributor a minimum of 90 percent of the first week’s gross, dropping gradually to 30 percent after several weeks.

These terms aren’t favorable to the exhibitor. A failure that closes quickly will yield almost nothing to the theater, and even a successful film will make most of its money in the first two or three weeks of release, when the exhibitor gets less of the revenue. Averaged out, a long-running success will likely yield no more than 50 percent of the gross to the theater.

To make up for this drawback, the distributor allows the exhibitor to deduct from the gross the expenses of running the theater (a negotiated figure called the *house nut*). In addition, the exhibitor gets all the cash from the concession stand, which may deliver up to 70 percent of the theater’s profits. Without high-priced snacks, movie houses couldn’t survive.

After the grosses are split with the exhibitor, the distribution company receives its share (the *rentals*) and divides it further. A major U.S. distributor typically takes 35 percent of the rentals as its distribution fee. If the distributor helped finance the

“Selling food is my job. I just happen to work in a theater.”
—Theater manager in upstate New York



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Every Monday, the weekend box office figures are news, but what do they mean? We add some nuance in "What won the weekend? Or how to understand box-office figures."



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James Schamus, then head of Focus Features, shares thoughts on independent distribution in "A man and his focus."

“Our underlying philosophy is that all media are one.”
 —Rupert Murdoch, owner of News Corp and Twentieth Century Fox

film, it takes another percentage off the top. The costs of prints and advertising are deducted as well. What remains comes back to the filmmakers. Out of the proceeds, the producer must pay all *profit participants*—the directors, actors, executives, and investors who have negotiated a share of the rental returns.

For most films, the amount returned to the production company is relatively small. Once the salaried workers have been paid, the producer and other major players usually must wait to receive their share from video and other ancillary markets. Because of this delay, and the suspicion that the major distributors practice misleading accounting, powerful actors and directors may demand “first-dollar” participation. In that case, their share will derive from the earliest money the picture returns to the distributor.

Majors and Minors The major distributors all belong to multinational corporations devoted to leisure activities. For example, Paramount Pictures, which produces and distributes films, is owned by Viacom, which controls Comedy Central, MTV, and other cable channels. Time Warner not only owns Warner Bros. but also has broadcast and cable services (CNN, HBO, Turner Classic Movies, and the Cartoon Network) along with publishing houses and magazines (*Time*, *Sports Illustrated*, *People*, and DC Comics). Twentieth Century Fox is a subsidiary of News Corp, which owns many newspapers, book publishers, cable news and sports channels, and half-interest in Australia’s National Rugby League. Columbia Pictures is an arm of Sony, which has extensive holdings in electronics, recorded music, and mobile communications.

Independent and overseas filmmakers usually don’t have access to direct funding from major distribution companies, so they try to presell distribution rights to finance production. Sometimes the distribution rights are sold in advance of production and provide some of the film’s budget. Alternatively, once a film is finished, a producer may try to attract distributors’ attention at film festivals. In 2012, *Beasts of the Southern Wild* won an award at the Sundance Film Festival and was bought by Fox Searchlight. It went on to win a major prize at the Cannes Film Festival and was nominated for four Academy Awards.

More specialized distributors, such as the New York firms Kino Lorber and Milestone, acquire rights to foreign and independent films for rental to art cinemas, colleges, and museums. As the audience for these films grew during the 1990s, major distributors sought to enter this market. The independent firm Miramax generated enough low-budget hits to be purchased by the Disney corporation. With the benefit of Disney’s funding and wider distribution reach, Miramax movies such as *Pulp Fiction*, *Scream*, *Shakespeare in Love*, and *Hero* earned even bigger box office receipts. Sony Pictures Classics funded art house fare that sometimes crossed over to the multiplexes, as *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* did.

By belonging to multinational conglomerates, the big film distributors gain access to private investors, bank financing, and other sources of funding. Branch offices in major countries can carry a film into worldwide markets. Sony’s global reach allowed it to release 11 different soundtrack CDs for *Spider-Man 2*, each one featuring artists famous in local territories. Just as important, media conglomerates can build *synergy*—focusing the film, music, television, and publishing sectors of the company on promoting a piece of “branded content.” The Disney company followed the release of *Frozen* with a soundtrack album, books, a ride at Disney theme parks, a Broadway show, and a *Frozen* storyline in a television series on ABC (a network owned by Disney). Every product promotes the others, and each wing of the parent company gets more business. One film can even advertise another within its story (1.43). Although synergy sometimes fails, multimedia giants are in the best position to take advantage of it.

Distributors arrange release dates, make prints, and launch advertising campaigns. For big companies, distribution can be efficient because the costs can be spread out over many units. One poster design can be used in several markets, and



1.43 Product placement. In *Lethal Weapon*, as Murtaugh and Riggs leave a hotdog stand, they pass in front of a movie theater. The shot provides advance publicity for *The Lost Boys*, another Warner Bros. film released four months after *Lethal Weapon*. The prominence of Pepsi-Cola in this shot is an example of *product placement*—featuring well-known brands in a film in exchange for payment or cross-promotional services.

a distributor who orders a thousand prints from a laboratory will pay less per print than the filmmaker who orders one. Large companies are also in the best position to cope with the rise of distribution costs. Today, the average Hollywood film is estimated to cost over \$100 million to make and an additional \$50 million to distribute.

Release Patterns The risky nature of mass-market filmmaking has led the majors to two distribution strategies: *platforming* and *wide release*. With platforming, the film opens first in a few big cities. It then gradually expands to theaters around the country, although it may never play in every community. If the strategy is successful, anticipation for the film builds, and it remains a point of discussion for months. The major distributors tend to use platforming for unusual films, such as *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* and *Selma*, which need time to accumulate critical support and positive word-of-mouth. Smaller distributors use platforming out of necessity, since they can’t afford to make enough prints to open wide, but the gradual accumulation of buzz can work in their favor, too.

In wide release, a film opens at the same time in many cities and towns. In the United States, this requires that thousands of copies be shipped out, so wide release is available only to the deep-pocketed major distributors. Wide release is the typical strategy for mainstream films, with two or three new titles opening each weekend on 2,000–4,000 screens. A film in wide release may be a midbudget one—a comedy, an action picture, a horror or science fiction film, or a children’s animated movie. Or it may be a very big-budget item, a *tentpole* picture such as *The Dark Knight Rises* or a *Hunger Games* installment.

Distributors hope that a wide opening signals a “must-see” film, the latest big thing. Just as important, opening wide helps to recoup costs faster, since the distributor gets a larger portion of box office receipts early in the run. Still, it’s a gamble. If a film fails in its first weekend, it almost never recovers momentum and can lose money very quickly. Even successful films usually lose revenues by 40 percent or more every week they run. So when two high-budget films open wide the same weekend, the competition is harmful to all. Companies tend to plan their tentpole release dates to avoid head-to-head conflict.

Wide releasing has extended across the world. As video piracy has spread, distribution companies have realized the risks of opening wide in the United States



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With help from some colleagues, we defend movie franchises in “Live with it! There’ll always be movie sequels. Good thing, too.”



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Fan events like Comic-Con have become a new way for Hollywood distributors to promote popular films directly to moviegoers, as we discuss in “Comic-Con 2008, Part 2.”

and then waiting weeks or months before opening overseas. By then, illegal DVDs and Internet downloads would stifle the theatrical release. As a result, U.S. companies undertake *day-and-date* releasing for their biggest tentpole pictures. *Matrix: Revolutions* opened simultaneously on 8,000 screens in the United States and 10,000 screens in 107 other countries. In a stroke of showmanship, the first screening was synchronized to start at the same minute across all time zones.

Selling the Film The distributor provides not only the movie but a publicity campaign. The theater is sent a *trailer*, a short preview of the upcoming film. Many executives believe that a trailer is the single most effective piece of advertising. Shown in theaters, it gets the attention of confirmed moviegoers. Posted on websites, a trailer gains mass viewership.

Publicists run press junkets, bringing entertainment reporters to interview the stars and principal filmmakers. "Infotainment" coverage in print, broadcast media, and online builds audience awareness. A making-of documentary, commissioned by the studio, may be shown on cable channels. A prominent film's premiere creates an occasion for further press coverage (1.44). For journalists, the distributor provides electronic press kits (EPKs), complete with photos, background information, star interviews, and clips of key scenes. Even a modestly budgeted production such as *Waiting to Exhale* had heavy promotion: five separate music videos, star visits to Oprah Winfrey, and displays in thousands of bookstores and beauty salons. Marketing costs for summer blockbusters may run as high as \$200 million.

Most of those costs will go toward TV advertisements and outdoor displays such as billboards and bus-shelter posters. Less expensive, but for young audiences more attractive, is marketing on the Internet. In 1999, two young directors found their target audience by creating a website purporting to investigate sightings of the Blair Witch. "The movie was an extension of the website," noted a studio executive. When *The Blair Witch Project* earned over \$130 million in the United States, distributors woke up to the power of the Internet. Now every film has a webpage, enticing viewers with plot information, star biographies, games, screen savers, and links to merchandise.

Distributors have realized that young Web surfers will eagerly promote a film if they're allowed to participate in getting the word out. Fan sites such as Harry Knowles's *Ain't It Cool News* publicize upcoming films through steady leaks and

exclusive access. Every few days during the production of *King Kong*, Peter Jackson sent brief "Production Diaries" to a fan site; the full set of 90 "entries" were later released as an elaborate DVD boxed set. Social networking sites such as Facebook and services such as Twitter are filled with Hollywood publicity. When filming outdoor chase scenes for *Transformers: Age of Extinction*, the crew permitted onlookers to use their smartphones to shoot what they saw and post amateur making-of clips online.

Audience participation went further in a publicity campaign that has become a model of cyber-marketing. For *The Dark Knight*, a consulting firm created an alternate reality game (ARG) called "Why So Serious?" The premise was that Batman's adversary, the Joker, was recruiting gang members. On websites and social media, fans found clues that sent them racing to real street addresses. There they found coded instructions for getting closer to the master criminal. In the most famous phase,

people who decoded a cryptic message were sent to bakeries, where they found chocolate cakes containing cellphones (with new information) and a playing card, the joker. The trails of clues took players to websites with trailers, sequences from the film, and free tickets. "Why So Serious?" ran over a 14-month period and is said to have engaged 10 million people worldwide (1.45).

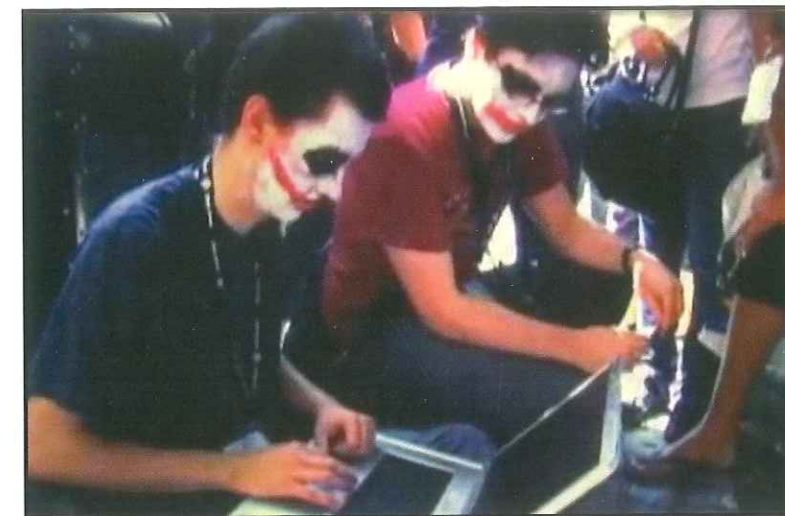
Merchandising is a form of promotion that pays back its investment directly. Manufacturing companies license the rights to use the film's characters, title, or images on products. These licensing fees defray production and distribution costs. If the merchandise catches on, it can provide the studio with long-term income from an audience that might never have seen the film. Although *Tron* did poorly in theatrical release in 1982, the *Discs of Tron* video game became a popular arcade attraction.

Today nearly all major motion pictures rely on merchandising, if only of a novelization or a soundtrack CD. A successful blockbuster can reap a merchandising bonanza. Children's films tend to exploit the gamut of possibilities: toys, games, clothing, lunch boxes, and schoolbags. There were *Shrek* ring tones, bowling balls, and hospital scrubs. George Lucas's entertainment empire was built on his ownership of the licensing rights for *Star Wars* merchandise. The four *Transformers* films grossed about a billion dollars each at theaters, but their toys, video games, and apps have yielded over \$7 billion.

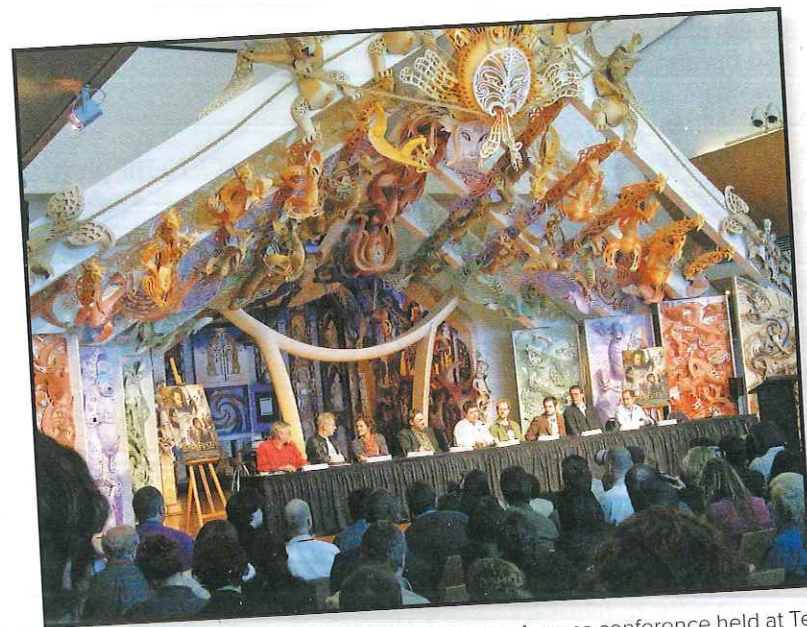
Merchandising is not only aimed at children. Given the aging population of Harry Potter readers and the darkening tone of the films, Warner Bros. concentrated on high-end collectibles, such as wool scarves and silk ties based on the characters' costumes. Reportedly, about 70 percent of Potter action figures are bought by college students.

Smaller-budget films can sometimes imitate the big promotional efforts. The campaign for Wes Anderson's *The Grand Budapest Hotel* offered eccentric products, such as mustache wax, on eBay auctions. Videos showing how to create pastries like those in the film went viral. Fans began posting footage of their own creations, and those featured in ads on television cooking shows. The script of the film was published, as was Anderson's curated collection of stories that inspired him. A hefty art book consisting of interviews and essays about the film was published just before the 2015 Academy Awards ceremony. Interestingly, Anderson has permitted fans to make and sell their own merchandise inspired by his films. For big-studio projects, the property is the brand, but for an independent like Anderson, the brand is the filmmaker himself.

In addition to merchandising, there is *cross-promotion*, or *brand partnering*. This tactic allows a film and a product line to be advertised simultaneously. A partner company, in the case of children's films often a fast-food chain or a soft-drinks manufacturer, receives the right to use characters from a film in its advertising. In exchange, the firm commits to spending a certain amount on ads and promotions featuring its products and the film's characters. Such a bargain can shift tens of millions of dollars in publicity costs away from the studios. *How to Train Your Dragon 2* had tie-ins with candy, bubblegum, and McDonald Happy Meals. Other cross-promotional campaigns are designed for adults. The James Bond films have long relied on cobranding, with stars featured in ads and the products appearing in the films. *Skyfall* was cross-promoted with Coke Zero, Heineken beer, Bollinger champagne, Omega watches, Jaguar cars, Range Rover, perfumes, and nail polishes.



1.45 Why so serious? For the *Dark Knight* alternate reality game, players were encouraged to wear Joker makeup as they gathered on the street and scanned the Net for clues and commands.



1.44 Publicity builds audience awareness. A press conference held at Te Papa Museum in Wellington, New Zealand, as part of the December 1, 2003, world premiere of *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*.



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Internet sites don't guarantee success. We speculate on why in "Snakes, no, Borat, yes. Not all Internet publicity is the same."

GUS VAN SANT: Your films have dominated the museum circuit in America—Minneapolis, Columbus . . .

DEREK JARMAN: Yes, Minneapolis in particular. That's where the films have actually had their life. They've crept into the student curriculum—which is a life. And now they go on through video. I never really feel shut out.

—Gus Van Sant, director, interviewing Derek Jarman, independent filmmaker



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Have Hollywood films declined in popularity internationally? We don't think so, as we explain in "World rejects Hollywood blockbusters!"



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How did theaters convert from 35mm film projection to digital projection? The story is told in our blog series, "Pandora's Digital Box" and in our e-book of the same title.

Exhibition: Theatrical and Nontheatrical

We're most familiar with the exhibition phase of the business, the moment when we pay for a movie ticket or play a DVD or stream a movie. *Theatrical* exhibition involves screening to a public that pays admission, as in commercial movie houses. Other theatrical sites are city art centers, museums, film festivals, and cinema clubs. *Nontheatrical* exhibition includes all other presentations, such as home video, cable transmissions, Internet downloads, and screenings in schools and colleges.

Public movie exhibition centers on the commercial theater. Most theaters screen wide releases from the major distributors, while others specialize in foreign-language or independent films. In all, the theatrical moviegoing audience is not a colossal one. In the United States, admissions average around 30 million per week, which sounds like a huge number until we realize that the weekly television audience numbers about 200 million. Only about 10 percent of the U.S. population visits movie theaters once a month or more; about one-third never goes at all.

The most heavily patronized theaters belong to chains or circuits, and in most countries, these circuits are controlled by a few companies. Until the 1980s, most theaters housed only one screen, but exhibitors began to realize that several screens under one roof could reduce costs. The multiplex theater, containing up to 15 or more screens, lured far bigger crowds than a single-screen cinema could. Centralized projection booths and concession stands also cut costs.

The boom in building multiplexes allowed exhibitors to upgrade the presentation, offering stadium seating, digital sound, and in some cases Imax and 3D. Multiplexes can also devote occasional screenings to niche markets, as when live opera broadcasts are shown digitally. Multiplexes are now the norm in most of the world, with snacks adjusted to local tastes—popcorn and candy nearly everywhere, but also salty licorice (in the Netherlands) and dried squid (in Hong Kong).

The United States is the most lucrative national market, contributing 25 percent of global box office receipts (see "Movies on Screens" chart). China comes in second because of its immense urban population. China's economy and its film industry are still on the rise; in 2014 alone, 15 new screens opened every day. Consequently, the country's share of world revenues will grow even larger. The most important regional market outside North America is Western Europe (including the United Kingdom and the Nordic countries), which provides 25 percent of the global box office. Filmmakers around the world aim for distribution in these lucrative markets.

Overseas multiplexes have yielded great benefits for Hollywood. Some American distributors have invested in foreign chains, thus guaranteeing an outlet for their products. In addition, comfortable multiplexes attract more prosperous viewers. Because multiplexes tend to charge higher prices than older theaters, the cost of tickets has risen throughout the world. Some price hikes are also attributable to 3D and Imax showings, which have proven enormously popular outside the United States.

In 1999, four of the 3,100 theaters in which *Star Wars: Episode I—The Phantom Menace* played had digital projectors. At the end of 2014, there were over 127,000 digital theater screens worldwide—90 percent of all screens. As an exhibition format, 35mm film was confined to countries with struggling economies and, in the rich world, to archives and specialized theaters.

Although films are shown in such venues as museums, archives, and film clubs, the most important theatrical alternative to commercial movie houses has become the *film festival*. The first major annual film festival was held in Venice in 1932, and although it had to be suspended during World War II, it was revived afterward and endures today. Festivals were mounted in Cannes, Berlin, Karlovy Vary, Moscow, Edinburgh, and many other cities. Today there are thousands of festivals all over the world—some large and influential, such as the Toronto Film Festival, and others aimed primarily at bringing unusual films to local audiences.

Movies on Screens: A 2013 Profile of International Theatrical Exhibition

Worldwide production of theatrical motion pictures: **6,300 features**

Worldwide attendance: **6.53 billion admissions**

Worldwide number of screens: **136,497**

Worldwide box office receipts: **\$35.4 billion**

U.S. box office receipts: **\$9.9 billion**

Western Europe box office receipts: **\$8.2 billion**

China box office receipts: **\$3.5 billion**

Countries and Numbers of Screens

Highest: USA 39,783; China 18,109; India 11,081; Mexico 5,594; France 5,587; Germany 4,610; Russia 4,119; UK 3,897; Spain 3,675; Japan 3,318; Italy 2,977

Lowest: Malta 37; Netherlands 36; Azerbaijan 29; Macedonia 26; Tunisia 17

Annual Admissions

Highest: India 1.98 billion; USA 1.22 billion; China 610 million; Mexico 257 million; South Korea 213 million; France 190.9 million; Russia 177.1 million; UK 165.5 million; Japan 155.9 million; Brazil 145.9 million

Other: Australia 87 million; New Zealand 14.5 million; Iceland 1.4 million (highest per capita film attendance, with 4.3 visits per year)

Average Ticket Prices in U.S. Dollars

Highest: Switzerland \$16.80; Norway \$15.80; Sweden \$15.20; Denmark \$13.80; Japan \$12.80

Lowest: Egypt \$2.50; Philippines \$2.20; Venezuela \$.80; India \$.60

Others: Australia \$12.90; UK \$10.20; France \$8.60; Canada \$8.34; USA \$8.00; China \$5.80

Sources: *IHS Media Technology Digest* and *Focus: World Film Market Trends 2014*

Some festivals promote specific genres, such as the Brussels International Festival of Fantastic Film, or specific subject matter, such as the New York Gay and Lesbian Film Festival.

The big festivals may show major Hollywood films. In 2013, *The Great Gatsby* was the opening-night presentation at the Cannes International Film Festival. Usually, however, the focus is on less mainstream cinema. Some festivals, like those in Cannes and Pusan, South Korea, include markets where such films can find distributors. The International Film Festival Rotterdam even helps to finance films made in developing countries. Not all festivals award prizes, but the bigger ones that do—most notably Cannes, Venice, and Berlin—can draw attention to films that might otherwise get lost among the hundreds of movies circulating among festivals.

Festivals offer an outlet for films that might never be picked up for release beyond their country of origin. For example, during the mid-1980s, programmers showcased the films of Abbas Kiarostami, Mohsen Makhmalbaf, and other Iranian directors. By winning prizes and critical acclaim at festivals, Iranian films gained commercial distribution in Europe and North America.

“I've come to realize that my festival run is my theatrical run.”
—Joe Swanberg, independent film director, *Hannah Takes the Stairs*



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Films may be altered as they move from window to window. We show what happened to the airline version of *The Grand Budapest Hotel* in "Proof! and a minor mystery."

Ancillary Markets: Taking Movies beyond the Theater

When a film leaves theatrical distribution, it lives on. Home video creates a vast array of ancillary markets "downstream," and taken together these return more money than the theatrical release windows and the Web.

Distributors carefully plan the timing of their video releases according to *windows* of scheduling. Typically the video version appears first on hotel pay-television systems, then on pay-per-view cable, then on DVD release, then on pay cable outlets like HBO, and eventually on network broadcast and basic cable. Thanks to greater Internet bandwidth, video on demand (VOD) has become an important window. Sometimes VOD becomes available after a film's theatrical release, sometimes during it, and sometimes even before it.

Each window is delayed by a certain period from the initial release. For example, DVD/Blu-ray releases become available three to six months after the film's theatrical opening. The windows strategy maximizes the income from consumers with different levels of interest. Video has proved a boon to smaller distributors, too. Foreign and independent films yield slim returns in theatrical release, but DVD and VOD can make these items profitable.

With only 10 percent of Americans being regular moviegoers, television, in one form or another, has kept the theatrical market going. During the 1960s, the U.S. television networks began supporting Hollywood production by purchasing broadcast rights to the studios' output. Lower-budget filmmakers depended on sales to European television and U.S. cable outlets. Videocassette versions arrived in the 1980s, and surprisingly they didn't harm the theatrical side of the business. In 1997, when the DVD format was introduced, consumers embraced it as a substitute for VHS tape. In the United States, the Walmart chain became the main purveyor of DVDs, accounting for over a third of all sales.

The major U.S. studios set up home entertainment divisions to sell DVDs. Because the discs cost less than VHS tapes to create, the studios reaped huge rewards. The cable and network television aftermarket remained brisk as well. Currently a studio film earns only a quarter or less of its total income from theatrical screenings. All forms of home video yield about 70 percent, with the remainder coming from licensed merchandise and other income.

Despite the swift success of the DVD format, it caused distributors some worries as well. The discs were easy to copy and manufacture in bulk, so piracy took off worldwide. A bootleg DVD of a Hollywood movie could sell for as little as 80 cents in China. Moreover, with tens of thousands of DVD titles available, shelf space was at a premium, so discount chains dumped slow-moving titles into bargain bins. DVD purchases stalled, and rentals became more popular with the rise of subscription services such as Netflix. The Blu-ray disc, which offered superior quality, was designed to replace the DVD, but sales didn't match the success of the earlier format.

The video market sustains most commercial filmmaking in the long run, but movie theatres remain central to the exhibition system. A theatrical screening focuses public interest. Critics review the film, television and the press publicize it, and people talk about it. The theatrical run usually determines how successful a movie will be in ancillary markets.

Even though the worldwide theatrical audience grew during the 1990s, most of the growth was in developing countries. U.S. and European attendance showed signs of flattening or even declining. Multiplexes were competing with home theaters, video games, and Internet entertainment. Exhibitors tried various ways to keep audiences coming.

One successful strategy involved building Imax screens in multiplexes and showing studio tentpole pictures in that immersive format. A second strategy focused on digital 3D. The push toward 3D production encouraged exhibitors to

install digital projection systems faster than they probably would have otherwise. In turn, the major studios began tailoring their blockbusters to 3D. Both Imax and 3D screenings charged higher ticket prices, which benefited exhibitor and distributor alike.

The stupendous rise in Internet usage after 2000 transformed distribution and exhibition. As more people acquired high-speed connections, films of any length could be made available online. For the major distributors, the Net offered a chance to resell their product, but without the problems of DVDs. Selling movies as downloads (termed "electronic sell-through" [EST]) or renting them as streaming video eliminated the cost of making discs. Encryption could prevent consumers from copying films. Netflix, Apple's iTunes store, Hulu (a consortium of Hollywood studios), among other smaller companies, launched online distribution services.

In 2013, U.S. digital transactions for film and television shows yielded over \$6.5 billion in total revenue. Sales and rentals of DVDs and Blu-ray discs yielded somewhat more, but viewers were starting to understand the advantages of "always on" media. To make downloading more attractive, media companies let consumers store their purchased films in online lockers that they could access with personal digital devices. Consumers, especially young ones who had grown up with the Net, were shifting away from packaged media and toward utilizing a service that made movies available to them at any moment.

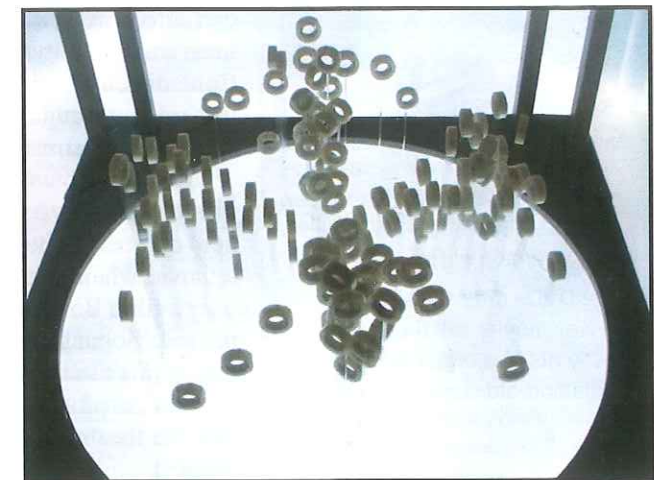
The major distributors were not the only beneficiaries of Web 2.0. The Net offers a far more level playing field than traditional distribution. Films that would never be shown in a multiplex can gain enormous audiences online. Judson Laipply's "Evolution of the Dance" (over 290 million views), "JK Wedding Entrance Dance" (nearly 88 million views), and innumerable pieces starring household pets showed that amateur videos, once limited to family or friends, could become Internet sensations. More carefully made films could get exposure on an unprecedented scale (1.46). Rival high schools won millions of viewers with elaborate single-take lipdubs. YouTube and Vimeo revived the short-film format for a new generation, and hopeful filmmakers saw posting a film online as a way to bypass corporate gatekeepers.

Some filmmakers still want to show their work in theaters. To meet that desire, festivals of DIY films have arisen, including the DIY Film Festival, based in Los Angeles and traveling to other cities. Another started in 2001, when 10 small teams of filmmakers in Washington, D.C., accepted a challenge to make a short film in 48 hours. All the completed shorts would be screened as a program immediately after the deadline. The result was the 48 Hour Film Project, which has become popular in dozens of cities around the world and which regularly sends films to international festivals.

DVDs and the Internet, videogame players and cellphones, laptops and tablet computers—all these have revolutionized movie viewing. Today people can watch films, short or long, amateur or professional, virtually anywhere. Digital technology not only changed theatrical exhibition; it redefined nontheatrical distribution and exhibition.

Artistic Implications of Distribution and Exhibition

Grosses, synergy, ticket prices, and movies on game consoles might seem very remote from issues of film as an art. Yet film is a technological medium usually aimed at a broad public, so the ways in which movies are circulated and shown



1.46 Distributing a film via the Web. Johan Rijpma's graceful *Tape Generations*, an abstract animation choreographing rolls of transparent tape, was downloaded over half a million times in 17 days.



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We talk about inventive teenage lipdubs as a form of film art in "2-4-6-8, whose lipdub do we appreciate?"



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In this age of new media, have movies lost their importance to audiences? Some would say yes, but we argue against that idea in "Movies still matter."



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Many movies are available on the Internet, for legal or illegal downloading. That doesn't mean every movie ever made will someday be online. We talk about why with two restoration experts in "The celestial multiplex."

can affect viewers' experiences. Home video turns viewing into a small-group or individual activity, but seeing a film in a packed theater yields a different response. Comedies, most people feel, seem funnier in a theater, where infectious laughter can ripple through a crowd. Filmmakers are aware of this difference, so they pre-view comedies many times to test audience reactions.



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Have DVDs radically changed the way movies tell their stories? Mostly not, we argue in "New media and old storytelling."

"The *Matrix* is entertainment for the age of media convergence, integrating multiple texts to create a narrative so large that it cannot be contained within a single medium."

—Henry Jenkins, media analyst

New Narrative Possibilities Video distribution and exhibition have created new choices in the realm of storytelling. Until the 1980s, people couldn't rewatch a movie whenever they wished. With videotape and then DVDs viewers can pore over a film. Bonus materials encourage them to rerun the movie to spot things they missed. Some filmmakers have taken advantage of this opportunity by creating puzzle films such as *Memento*, *Donnie Darko*, and *Inception*, which fans scrutinize for clues to plot enigmas (1.47, 1.48). Video versions can deviate from and complicate the theatrical release version, as the extra ending of *The Butterfly Effect* does. Some interactive DVD movies permit the viewers to choose how the plot develops. The DVD of Greg Marcks's *11:14* allows you to enter parallel storylines at various points, in effect recasting the film's overall form.

With the Internet as a major distribution platform, we should expect variations in narrative form. Short-form storytelling is already in full bloom online. Events like the festivals run by the 48 Hour Film Project also encourage the making of short films, especially given the assumption that most of the films will later be posted on the Internet. We're likely to find movies designed specifically for mobile phones; television series are already creating "mobisodes" branching off the broadcast storyline. The Web is the logical place for interactive films that use hyperlinks to amplify or detour a line of action.

1.47–1.48 Planting clues for DVD rewatching. A viewer scrutinizing *Magnolia* on DVD would notice that the extraordinary meteorological event at the climax is predicted by the recurring numerals 82, referring to chapter and verse in the biblical book of Exodus (1.47). Elsewhere, the figure 82 appears as coils in the rooftop hose (1.48).



1.47



1.48



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The concept of "transmedia storytelling"—shifting a story world's action across media platforms—was formulated by scholar Henry Jenkins. We discuss his ideas in "Now leaving from platform 1."

"Not until seeing [*North by Northwest*] again on the big screen did I realize conclusively what a gigantic difference screen size does make. . . . This may be yet another reason why younger people have a hard time with older pictures: they've only seen them on the tube, and that reduces films' mystery and mythic impact."

—Peter Bogdanovich, director, *The Last Picture Show* and *Mask*

Marketing and merchandising can extend a theatrical film's story in intriguing ways. The *Star Wars* novels and video games give the characters more adventures and expand spectators' engagement with the movies. The *Memento* website hinted at ways to interpret the film. The *Matrix* video games supplied key information for the films' plots, while the second movie in the trilogy sneaked in hints for playing the games. As a story world shifts from platform to platform, a multimedia saga is created, and viewers' experiences will shift accordingly. *Matrix* viewers who have never played the games understand the story somewhat differently from those who have.

Even product placement offers some artistic opportunities. We're usually distracted when a Toyota truck or a box of Frosted Flakes pops up on the screen, but *Back to the Future* cleverly integrates brands into its story. Marty McFly is catapulted from 1985 to 1955. Trapped in a period when diet soda didn't exist, he asks for a Pepsi Free, but the counterwoman says he'll have to pay for it. Later, buying a bottle of Pepsi from a vending machine, Marty tries frantically to twist off the cap, but his father-to-be George McFly casually pops it off at the machine's built-in opener. Pepsi soft drinks weave through the movie, reasserting Marty's comic inability to adjust to his parents' era, and perhaps stirring some nostalgia in viewers who remember how teenage life has changed since their youth.

Screens and Sounds: Stylistic Opportunities and Challenges

Distribution and exhibition can affect a filmmaker's stylistic choices as well. Consider modern sound systems. Today almost all multiplex theaters are equipped with some type of surround system such as Dolby Digital 5.1. In a 5.1 configuration, the first digit refers to the number of channels used (5), and the second (.1) refers to the use of a large subwoofer to reproduce low-frequency effects. Three speakers behind the screen are aligned with the left, center, and right areas of the image. The remaining two channels transmit sounds to the surround speakers. These are further split into left and right halves and are grouped along the side and back walls of the auditorium.

The center speaker emits most of the onscreen dialogue, as well as the most important sound effects. The left and right speakers are stereophonic, adding sound effects, music, and minor dialogue. These channels can suggest sound events within the frame or just off screen. The surround channels carry ambient sounds, music, and reverberation—that is, slightly delayed repetitions of sounds from other speakers.

Dolby 5.1 is currently the global standard for multichannel sound recording and reproduction. Whether the film is a visual-effects-heavy blockbuster, like *Transformers: Age of Extinction*, or a more modest psychological thriller, like *Black Swan*, most commercial theaters will present the film mixed in that format.

If you're a filmmaker, Dolby 5.1 gives you many creative opportunities. You can set visual action directly in front of your viewers, or you can surround them with a busy auditory environment similar to real life. The immersive effect is intensified by Dolby Atmos, a recently developed system that accommodates up to 64 distinct channels, some of them in the ceiling. Directors and supervising sound editors can now place sounds precisely within the theater space.

Brave, the first film mixed in Atmos, exploits this possibility in a scene where Merida receives "princess training" from her mother (1.49).



1.49 Surround-sound precision. As Merida recites a poem, the Queen says, "Enunciate! You must be understood from anywhere in the room, or it's all for naught." When Merida says under her breath, "This is all for naught," the camera briefly holds on her. The off-screen Queen's snappish reply, "I heard that!" comes from one of the left rear speakers. Her Majesty's demand that Merida project her voice to the entire room seems to be a boastful display of the power of the Atmos multichannel system.



1.50



1.51

1.50–1.51 Shot scale adjusted for image display. On the large screen of a CinemaScope theater, the faces of these characters in *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying* (1.50) would have been quite visible (1.50). Early television relied heavily on close-ups because of the small screen size, as in this shot from a 1953 *Dragnet* episode (1.51).



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We explore another peril of watching films on video—logos superimposed on films—in “Bugs: the secret history.”

1.52–1.53 Close-up or long shot? Extreme close-ups of actors' faces are common in modern cinema, as in this shot from *Red Eye*. Filmmakers are adjusting their style to the fact that most viewing takes place on video formats (1.52). In *Flowers of Shanghai*, director Hou Hsiao-hsien builds every scene out of full shots of several characters. The result loses information on a small display and is best seen on a theater screen (1.53).

Brave also showcases Atmos's ability to create an overhead zone. Describing a scene where Merida goes to retrieve an arrow, *Brave*'s sound designer, Gary Rydstrom, says, “I love putting sound in the ceiling, things like scary forest birds. For a little girl, the forest feels even taller and more imposing if you can have weird sounds way up high.”

Filmmakers have likewise responded to changes in image displays. In the early 1950s, new aspect ratios like CinemaScope made theater screens both wider and bigger overall. A common size was 24 feet by 64 feet. Many directors and producers believed that these screens made close-ups unnecessary, perhaps too aggressive. The new exhibition demands pushed many filmmakers toward distant framings and full-size figures (1.50).

By contrast, television of the same period displayed a small, rather unclear image, in some cases only 10 inches diagonally. If you were a filmmaker obliged to fill the fuzzy little frame, you'd probably do what TV directors did. They tended to rely on close shots, which were more visible on the monitor (1.51).

Today both extremes exist. Modern multiplex screens can be quite large, but most people will see a film on a video monitor or a computer screen. Accordingly, commercial films tend to favor medium and close views, which are more readable on small displays (1.52). Yet some contemporary filmmakers have picked the alternative option, designing their films for the scale of a theater screen (1.53).

Every change in technology and exhibition has forced filmmakers to make tough choices. For example, many films contain images wider than nearly all video



1.52



1.53



1.54



1.55

1.54–1.55 Changing compositions in video distribution. In *Jaws*, a wide image in the original (1.54) is cropped to fit 16 × 9 TV monitors for a cable airing (1.55).

and computer monitors. How can these small displays respect the filmmaker's intentions?

The best solution, seen on DVDs and many cable and streaming services, is *letterboxing*. With letterboxing, dark bands at the top and bottom of the screen allow for the whole image to be shown. If the image isn't letterboxed, then parts of it must be cut off to make it fit the monitor (1.54, 1.55). This process, called *pan-and-scan*, was common with consumer videotapes and can still be seen on some cable and streaming services, as well as on airplane in-flight monitors. Often these versions are prefaced by the comment that the film has been “adjusted to fit your screen.”

Again, an exhibition format has affected filmmakers' creative choices. Because home video might crop part of the image, some directors compose their shots so that the key action is concentrated in an area that will fit smaller displays (1.56).

Other problems with consumer video displays can't be solved by the filmmaker. Older films were designed in an approximately 4 × 3 ratio, and traditional television monitors were in accord with that. The introduction of widescreen TV monitors has created a new problem for film images. Monitors with a 16 × 9 ratio can reproduce some modern films faithfully, but older material can suffer by being stretched and distorted (1.57). Some monitors allow adjusting the ratio by creating black bands on the sides to provide “windowboxing.” In this case, the viewer must take the initiative and respect the intentions of the filmmakers.



1.56 Adjusting composition for the television frame. As with many modern wide-screen films, the essential information on screen left in this shot from *Catch Me If You Can* would fit within squarer video displays. Still, cropping out the right half would lose a secondary piece of information—the pile of take-out food cartons that implies that Agent Hanratty has been at his desk for days.



1.57 Incorrect aspect ratio. Here the 4 × 3 image from *Angel Face* (1952) is rendered on an incorrectly set 16 × 9 widescreen television monitor. Many viewers do not know how to change a monitor's ratio, and some monitors make it difficult to correct the problem.



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Jean-Luc Godard's films present special challenges to the projectionist and DVD producer, as we show in “Godard comes in many shapes and sizes.”

> SUMMARY

The art of film depends on technology, from the earliest experiments in apparent motion to the most recent computer programs. It also depends on people who use that technology, who come together to make films, distribute them, and show them. As long as a film is aimed at an audience, however small, it enters into a social dynamic of production, distribution, and exhibition. Out

of technology and work processes, filmmakers create an experience for their viewers. Along the way, they inevitably make choices about film form and style. What options are available to them? How might filmmakers organize the film? How might they draw on the techniques of the medium? The next two parts of this book survey the possibilities.

PART

2

Chapter 1 outlined some ways in which people, working with technology, make films. Now we can ask more basic questions.

If you were to make a film, what would guide you in putting the whole thing together? How would you fit the various parts to one another? How would you try to shape the viewer's experience of the whole film? Thinking about these questions will help us understand how we respond to individual movies and how cinema works as an artistic medium.

The next two chapters explore questions like these. We assume that a film isn't a random assortment of things. If it were, viewers wouldn't care if they missed a movie's ending, or if scenes were shown out of order. But viewers do care. When you describe a book as hard to put down or a song as engaging, you're implying that a pattern exists there. The pattern is pulling you along. This overall pattern of relationships among parts is called *form*.

Chapter 2 examines form in film. This concept is one key to understanding cinema as an art. Filmmakers are thinking about a film's form at each stage of the production process, and formal matters demand creative decisions at every turn.

Although there are several ways of organizing films into formal wholes, the one that we most commonly encounter involves telling a story. Filmmakers are well aware that narrative form arouses our interest and impels us to follow a series of events from start to finish. Chapter 3 examines how certain principles allow a story to arouse and fulfill our expectations. We consider examples of nonnarrative form in Chapter 10.

Film Form

CHAPTER

2

The Significance of Film Form

You are a filmmaker. How might you start your movie? With an exciting bit of action that grabs the viewer's interest? Or with something more slowly paced that gradually builds up involvement?

Steven Spielberg's *Jurassic Park* follows option one. Park workers nervously surround a shipping container housing an unseen, thrashing, roaring beast. Workers train their weapons on the case as it's opened to release the creature into the park. The gate slides open, but the heaving cage knocks a worker to the ground. Suddenly he's seized and dragged into the container (2.1). The guards fire at the creature, but the man slides into darkness.

The film doesn't present another dinosaur attack for an hour. In the meantime, we get background information about the park, its genetically bred inhabitants, and the characters who have been brought there. Conflicts build and schemes emerge. Yet before all this development of the drama, Spielberg and his screenwriters Michael Crichton and David Koepp have given us a taste of the suspense and physical action coming up later. Since the opening doesn't show us the velociraptor, we look forward to seeing the beast fully, and in action. The filmmakers' creative decisions have shaped our experience—teasing us with the promise of thrills but making us wait while the plot is filled in. Primed by this opening, we'll be vigilant for anything that would put the characters at risk. And of course the violence of the first scene gives the lie to the bland cuteness of the park's publicity rolled out in later scenes. We know, as the visiting scientists don't, that behind the family-friendly surface this is a dangerous place.

Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* begins in a far less aggressive way. During a desert sandstorm, men in goggles and protective suits meet a French scientist. They exchange greetings before pressing forward to check a fleet of vintage airplanes, reported missing in 1945. The man serving as a translator raises a flurry of questions: "Where's the crew? How did they get here?" (2.2) The investigative team finds an old man nearby. Although his face is badly sunburned, he's smiling. "He says the sun came out last night. He says it sang to him."

Instead of shocking us with violence, *Close Encounters*' opening poses a series of mysteries. Those will deepen in the scenes to come: a UFO swerves near a commercial jet, a little boy follows unseen home invaders into the night. The calmness of the opening, the friendly professionalism of the scientists, and the joyous reaction of the old man to what he's seen indicate that the film will be gentle, slow-moving, and concerned with characters trying to understand what is making extraordinary things happen. This will be an interplanetary mystery story, not a horror-action-adventure like *Jurassic Park*.



2.1



2.2

2.1–2.2 Hard and soft openings. Grabbing the audience in *Jurassic Park* (2.1) versus enticing the audience in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (2.2).

Either strategy for starting a movie, abrupt or gradual, can have a strong effect on the viewer. The choices come down to a matter of *form*—the way parts work together to create an overall effect. If you are a director or screenwriter, you face perpetual choices about form. As a viewer, you are responding to it at every moment.

The Concept of Form in Film

Form as Pattern

The arts offer us intensely involving experiences. We say that movies draw us in or immerse us. We can lose track of time when listening to music, and when we enjoy a novel, we may say, "I really got into it." All these ways of talking suggest that artworks involve us by engaging our senses, feelings, and mind in a *process*. That process sharpens our interest, focuses our attention, urges us forward. How does this happen?

Because the artist has created a pattern. Artists design their works—they give them form—so that we can have a structured experience. For this reason, form is of central importance in film.

"I believe in soft openings for movies. . . . I think it's almost impossible to lose an audience in the first ten minutes. . . . It's not television. You don't have to grab them. In a movie with a very fast opening, you end up paying for it somewhere along the way—usually by having to explain what happened in the fast and furious action."

—Robert Towne, screenwriter, *Chinatown*

“Screenplays are structure.”
—William Goldman, screenwriter, *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*

Our minds are very good at finding patterns in things—faces in the clouds, a rhythm in a downpour. Artworks rely on this dynamic, unifying effort of the human mind. Novels present a pattern of events that create suspense or surprise, while paintings expect that we’ll be sensitive to composition and color. Artworks in all media ask us to pay attention, to anticipate upcoming events, to construct a whole out of parts, and to feel an emotional response to the pattern that we help create.

In similar ways, a film coaxes us to connect sequences into a larger whole. The savage attack at the start of *Jurassic Park* establishes the park’s raptors as a force to be reckoned with later. We’d be disappointed if they never reappeared in the plot. Similarly, *Close Encounters* promises to reveal the fates of the missing World War II pilots and the runaway boy.

Even small details get linked in a pattern. Early in *Collateral*, the taxi driver Max is shown wiping down his cab’s dashboard and steering wheel before setting out on his night shift. He then carefully clips a snapshot to his sun visor. For a moment, he gazes at the postcard view of a tropical island (2.3). These gestures prompt us to see Max’s personality as neat and orderly. They also suggest that in the city’s turmoil, he clears a quiet mental space for himself. The next scene’s cues reinforce our judgment of Max’s character (2.4, 2.5). Small or large, local or far-ranging, the patterns we find engage our interest, our minds, and our emotions.

These instances suggest that a film is not simply a random batch of elements. Like all artworks, a film has **form**. By form, in its broadest sense, we mean the overall set of relationships among a film’s parts.

This description of form is still very abstract, so let’s draw some examples from one movie you’ve probably seen. In *The Wizard of Oz*, the viewer is expected to follow a story—that is, a pattern of *narrative* elements. These are events that involve the characters. Dorothy dreams that a tornado blows her to Oz. There she encounters other characters, and together they have adventures. Eventually Dorothy awakens from her dream to find herself home in Kansas. Alongside the story, we can also notice *stylistic* elements: the way the camera moves, the arrangements of color in the frame, the use of music, and other devices. Stylistic elements utilize the various film techniques we’ll be considering in later chapters.

Because *The Wizard of Oz* is designed to give us a particular experience, we actively relate the elements within each set to one another. We know that the narrative elements form a pattern, a story. We see the tornado as causing Dorothy’s trip to Oz, and her adventures there result from her desire to get home. Likewise, we identify the characters in Oz as similar to characters in Dorothy’s Kansas life. Various stylistic elements also form patterns. We recognize the “We’re Off to See the Wizard” tune whenever Dorothy picks up a new companion. Our experience of the film depends on our recognizing and anticipating how these broad patterns will develop.

Moreover, our minds tie these two sorts of patterning together. In *The Wizard of Oz*, the narrative development can be linked to the stylistic patterning. Colors identify story landmarks, such as Kansas (in black and white) and the Yellow Brick Road. Movements of the camera call our attention to story action. And the music serves to describe certain characters and situations. The relationships among all these elements make up the overall form of *The Wizard of Oz*.

“Form” Versus “Content”

Very often people think of “form” as the opposite of something called “content.” This implies that a poem or a musical piece or a film is like a jug. An external shape, the jug, *contains* a liquid that could just as easily be held in a cup or a pail. Under this assumption, form becomes less important than whatever it’s presumed to contain.

We don’t accept this assumption. We think that every component functions as part of a pattern, big or small, that engages the viewer. So we’ll treat as formal elements many things that some people consider content. From our standpoint, subject matter and abstract ideas all enter into the total form of the artwork. They may cue



2.3



2.4



2.5

2.3–2.5 Patterns create character. Max is introduced as able to tune out his environment, thanks to the island on his postcard (2.3). We’re reminded of this when in the next scene, as the passengers quarrel, he tips down the visor and stares at the postcard, as if to shut out the unpleasantness in his back seat (2.4, 2.5).

us to frame certain expectations or imagine certain possibilities. The viewer relates these elements to one another dynamically. Consequently, subject matter and ideas become somewhat different from what they might be outside the artwork.

Consider extraterrestrials and UFOs. In popular thinking, aliens can be either peaceful or hostile, but if you were going to make a film about UFOs, you’d have to decide how to treat the subject. That would be a decision about form. In *Independence Day*, presenting the aliens as an invading horde fits well with a story of Americans of all classes uniting to conquer a threat. By contrast, *Close Encounters of the Third*

Kind treats alien visitors as spiritual teachers, creatures who restore people's sense of wonder and promise a better life. The aliens of *Mars Attacks!* pretend to be peaceful but then turn treacherous, and their cunning reveals the ineptitude of the people in power. This treatment suits the film's satire of modern politics and media. In each case, the filmmakers' choices about form have repurposed the basic subject matter of aliens. What we might call the content is governed by the film's formal context.

Formal Expectations

We're now in a better position to see how film form grabs and holds us. It creates expectations and sustains them over time. Suppose that *Jurassic Park* never revealed the raptors, or *Close Encounters* never explained its puzzles. We'd think that something important had been left out, to say the least. Once we're caught up in following the interrelations among elements, we want the patterns to develop and conclude.

Expectations color our everyday experiences. Psychological experiments have shown that if people are told that a cheap wine is expensive, they rate it as tasting better than if they're told its true price. Creating expectations is central to advertising any product. A film's title, its poster, its online promotion, and its trailers aim to set up particular expectations. You would not go to a film called *12 Years a Slave* anticipating a raunchy teen comedy.

Expectation pervades our experience of artworks. In reading a mystery, we expect that a solution will be offered at some point, usually the end. In listening to a piece of music, we expect repetition of a melody or a motif. In looking at a painting, we search for what we expect to be the most significant areas, then scan the less prominent portions. From beginning to end, our involvement with a work of art depends largely on expectations.

We can illustrate this with a little experiment. Assume that "A" is the first letter of a series. What follows?

AB

After seeing A, you probably thought that the next letters would run in alphabetical order. Your expectation was confirmed. What follows AB? Most people would say "C." But form doesn't always follow our initial expectation.

ABA

Here form takes us a little by surprise. If we are puzzled by a formal twist, we readjust our expectations and try again. What follows ABA?

ABAC

Here the main possibilities were either ABAB or ABAC. (Note that your expectations limit possibilities as well as select them.) If you expected ABAC, your expectation was fulfilled, and you can confidently predict the next letter. If you expected ABAB, you still should be able to make a strong guess at the next letter:

ABACA

Simple as this game is, it illustrates the involving power of form. As a viewer or listener you don't simply let the parts parade past you. You enter into an active participation with them, creating and readjusting expectations as the pattern develops over time.

If you're a filmmaker, you want to arouse and shape viewers' expectations. This is what happens in the opening scenes of *Jurassic Park* and *Close Encounters*. Similarly, *The Wizard of Oz* begins with Dorothy running down a road with her dog Toto (2.6). Immediately, we form expectations. She seems to be fleeing from someone; will she be caught? Perhaps she will meet another character or arrive at her destination. Even such a simple action asks us to participate in the story's development by adjusting our expectations about what may happen. Much later in the film, we come to expect that Dorothy will get her wish to return to Kansas. Indeed, the settings of the film give *The Wizard of Oz* a large-scale ABA form: Kansas-Oz-Kansas.



2.6 What does the audience expect? Dorothy pauses while fleeing with Toto at the beginning of *The Wizard of Oz*.



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Even at the very beginning of a film, the title can give us clues to its subjects, themes, and form—or baffle us. We consider various options in "Title wave."

You probably noticed that the formal development of *The Wizard of Oz* didn't satisfy our expectations immediately, as our alphabet exercise did. When a filmmaker delays fulfilling an expectation, making us wait to see if the punch comes, the audience feels what we usually call *suspense*. As the term implies, suspense leaves something suspended—not only the next element in a pattern but also our urge for completion. Both the opening raptor attack in *Jurassic Park* and the mysteries in *Close Encounters* leave a pattern uncompleted, and as a result they keep us in suspense.

Expectations may also be cheated, as when we expect ABC but get ABA. In general, *surprise* is a result of an expectation that is revealed to be incorrect. We don't expect that a teenage boy troubled at home and at school will have a friend who has built a time machine. When this happens in *Back to the Future*, we understand that a high school comedy is turning into a science fiction movie.

One more pattern of our expectations needs tracing. Sometimes the filmmaker will cue us to think about what might have come *before* a certain point. When Dorothy runs down the road at the beginning of *The Wizard of Oz*, we wonder not only where she is going but where she's been and what she's fleeing from. In ways like these, filmmakers can arouse *curiosity* about earlier events. As Chapter 3 will show, curiosity is an important factor in narrative form.

Already we have several possible ways in which filmmakers' creative decisions about form can engage us. The filmmaker can cue us to make expectations and then gratify them. The expectations may be gratified quickly, as when we soon learn why Dorothy is running down the road. Or the filmmaker may wait quite a while before fulfilling our expectations, as with the raptors' eventual reappearance in *Jurassic Park*. And the filmmaker may set up expectations and then undercut them, creating surprise.

At a limit, the filmmaker may choose to disturb our expectations. We often associate art with pleasure, but many artworks offer us conflict, tension, and shock. An artwork's form may even strike us as unpleasant because of its imbalances or contradictions. For example, experimental films may jar rather than soothe us. Viewers frequently feel puzzled or shocked by *Eat, Scorpio Rising*, and other avant-garde works (pp. 369–386). We'll encounter similar challenges when we examine the editing of Sergei Eisenstein's *October* (Chapter 6) and the style of Jean-Luc Godard's *Breathless* (Chapter 11).

Yet even when they disturb us, filmmakers still arouse and shape formal expectations. For example, on the basis of our experience of most movie stories, we expect that the main characters introduced in the first half of a film will be present in the second half. Yet Wong Kar-wai punctures this expectation in *Chungking Express* (pp. 428–432). When our expectations are thwarted, we may feel disoriented, but then we adjust them to look for other, more appropriate, ways of engaging with the film's form.

If we can adjust our expectations to a disorienting work, we may find it satisfying in a new way. Hollis Frampton's *Zorns Lemma*, for example, slowly trains the viewer to associate a series of images with the letters of the alphabet (2.7, 2.8). Viewers often become quite absorbed in watching the series take shape as a cinematic picture puzzle. As *Chungking Express* and *Zorns Lemma* also suggest, a disturbing work can reveal to us our normal expectations about form. Such films can coax us to reflect on our taken-for-granted assumptions about how a movie must behave.

There is no limit to the number of ways in which a film can be organized. Some filmmakers will ask us to recast our expectations in drastic ways. Still, our enjoyment can increase if we welcome the unfamiliar experiences offered by formally challenging films.

Conventions and Experience

Our ABAC example illustrates still another point. One guide to your expectations is your *prior experience*. Your knowledge of the English alphabet makes ABA an unlikely sequence. This fact suggests that artistic form is not a pure activity isolated from other experiences.



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Why is it that we feel suspense even if we're rewatching a film and know the outcome? We talk about how that happens in "This is your brain on movies, maybe."

“Now, if you're going to do action films, a certain amount of repetition, which certainly is a kind of straitjacket, is inevitable. You are going to have to deal with gunfights and chases. . . .

So it becomes a kind of game. The audience knows what the conclusion will be, but you still have to entertain them. So you are always walking on the edge of a precipice—trying to juggle the genre expectations. . . .”

—Walter Hill, director, *The Driver* and *The Warriors*



2.7



2.8

2.7–2.8 Zorns Lemma repeats the alphabet over and over, gradually replacing signs beginning with each letter, such as O (2.7), with images that have no relation to the letter (2.8). By the end of the film, we have been taught a new “alphabet” of patterned imagery.

Artworks are human creations, and the artist lives in history and society. As a result, the artwork will relate, in some way, to other works and to aspects of the world. A tradition, a dominant style, a popular form—elements like these will be common to several different artworks. These common traits are usually called *conventions*.

For example, the first few scenes of a film often explain background information about the characters and the action; this sort of exposition is a narrative convention. *Genres*, as we will see in Chapter 9, depend heavily on conventions. Urban thrillers tend to feature spectacular car crashes, so Michael Mann’s use of the device in *Collateral* (pp. 7–8) accords with that genre convention. It’s a convention of the musical film that characters sing and dance, as in *The Wizard of Oz*. It’s one convention of narrative form that the conclusion solves the problems that the characters confront, and *Wizard* likewise accepts this convention by letting Dorothy return to Kansas.

If the filmmaker can’t avoid connecting to both art and the larger world, neither can the audience. When we respond to cues in the film, we call on our experiences of life and other artworks. You were able to play the ABAC game because you had learned the alphabet. You may have learned it in everyday life (in a classroom or from your parents) or from an artwork (perhaps from a rhyming song or TV cartoons). Similarly, we’re able to recognize the journey structure in *The Wizard of Oz* because we’ve taken trips ourselves. We’ve also read such books as Homer’s *Odyssey* and Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*, and we’ve seen other films organized around the journey pattern.

The filmmaker assumes that we viewers will draw on our knowledge of real life and our experience with artistic conventions. But what if the two principles come into conflict? In ordinary life, people don’t simply start to sing and dance, as they do in *The Wizard of Oz*. Very often conventions separate art from life, saying they do in *The Wizard of Oz*. Very often conventions separate art from life, saying they do in *The Wizard of Oz*. Very often conventions separate art from life, saying they do in *The Wizard of Oz*. Very often conventions separate art from life, saying they do in *The Wizard of Oz*.

Why do characters in musicals sing to one another? Why doesn’t Buster Keaton smile? It’s beside the point to ask such questions. Filmmakers assume that we’re familiar with conventions and are willing to go along with the game. You probably haven’t met a contract killer in real life, but the cues in the early scenes of *Collateral* prompt you to take Vincent as a movie version of a hit man.

Further, conventions can change. Very brief flashbacks to earlier events in the story are common in today’s films, but they would have been considered unusual in



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Slumdog Millionaire uses some conventions in novel ways, as we show in “Slumdogged by the past.”

“To a story-teller a journey is a marvelous device. It provides a strong thread on which a multitude of things that he has in mind may be strung to make a new thing, various, unpredictable, and yet coherent. My chief reason for using this form was technical.”

—J. R. R. Tolkien

the 1930s and 1940s. Similarly, conventions of earlier periods of film history can seem odd to us today. Filmmakers rely on existing conventions, but they also may try to create new ones. For example, some modern directors have deliberately made films that lack the quick turns of events we associate with Hollywood movies. Films like Béla Tarr’s *Satan’s Tango* move at a solemn pace and ask us to concentrate on details of setting and sound. In other words, we’re being asked to summon up an unusual set of expectations. As Tarr’s sort of filmmaking attracted interest, other filmmakers explored the approach, so that this trend created its own set of conventions.

Form and Feeling

Filmmakers devote a great deal of effort to infusing emotion into their movies. To see how this happens, let’s distinguish between *emotions represented* in the artwork and an *emotional response* felt by the spectator. If an actor grimaces in agony, the emotion of pain is represented within the film. But that emotion might not be felt by us in the audience; if the movie is a comedy, we might laugh. Both presented emotions and emotional responses have formal implications.

Emotions represented within the film play particular roles in the film’s overall form. The dinosaur wranglers in the opening of *Jurassic Park* are grim and tense; their emotional attitude fits Spielberg’s effort to show the park as a dangerous place. But the little boy in the opening of *Close Encounters* reacts to the offscreen aliens ransacking the kitchen with a smile of delight. This prepares us to expect that in later scenes the visitors will be shown as benevolent.

Form shapes the spectator’s emotional response, too. We have just seen how cues in the artwork interact with our prior experience, especially our experience of artistic conventions. At the start of *Jurassic Park*, we’re frightened and repelled. That’s partly because we’re naturally afraid of threatening creatures, but also we know that horror films include monsters that are designed to scare us.

Often, form in artworks appeals to our ready-made emotional responses. All other things being equal, we tend to smile at a gurgling baby and recoil from acts of torture. But form can create new responses instead of harping on old ones. An artwork may lead us to override or suspend our everyday emotional responses. No one wants to meet Hannibal Lecter in real life, but as a film character he may become spellbinding. In the abstract, we might find the land of Oz a child’s paradise. But because the film’s developing plot leads us to sympathize with Dorothy in her desire to go home, we feel satisfaction when she finally returns to Kansas.

The dynamic aspect of form also engages our feelings. Expectation, for instance, spurs emotion. When the filmmaker gets us wondering about what will happen next, we’re likely to invest some emotion in the situation. Delayed fulfillment of an expectation—suspense—may produce anxiety or sympathy. (Will the detective find the criminal? Will boy get girl? Will the melody return?) Gratified expectations may produce a feeling of satisfaction or relief. (The detective solves the mystery; boy does get girl; the melody returns one more time.) Cheated expectations and curiosity about past material may produce puzzlement or keener interest. (So he isn’t the detective? This isn’t a romance story? Has a second melody replaced the first one?)

Note that all of these possibilities *may* occur. No recipe can guarantee that the filmmaker will achieve a specific emotional response. It is all a matter of context—that is, of each artwork’s overall form. All we can say for certain is that the emotion felt by the spectator will emerge from formal patterns that she or he perceives in the work. This is one reason why we should try to notice as many formal relations as possible in a film. The richer our perception, the deeper and more complex our response may become.

The death of a child is perhaps the most sorrowful event that can occur in people’s lives. Most films would use this event to summon up the sadness we would also feel in life. But artistic form can alter the emotional tenor of even this unhappy situation. In Jean Renoir’s *The Crime of M. Lange*, the cynical publisher Batala rapes and abandons Estelle, a young laundress. After Batala disappears, Estelle



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On slow-moving movies, see “The sarcastic laments of Béla Tarr” and “Tony and Theo.”

“If my film makes one more person feel miserable, I’ll feel I’ve done my job.”

—Woody Allen, director, *Hannah and Her Sisters*



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Scholars have studied the ways in which we respond emotionally to movies. We discuss their lines of argument in “Now you see it, now you can’t.”



2.9



2.10

2.9–2.10 Context reshaping emotion. In *The Crime of M. Lange*, the neighbors initially display grief at the news of Batala and Estelle's baby (2.9). But in reaction to Batala's cousin's remark, everyone breaks out into smiles (2.10). The film's formal development has rendered appropriate a reaction that might be perverse in ordinary life.

becomes integrated into the neighborhood and returns to her former fiancé. But Estelle is pregnant by Batala and bears his child.

The scene when Estelle's employer, Valentine, announces that the child was born dead is one of the most emotionally complex in cinema. The first reactions expressed by the characters are gravity and sorrow (2.9). Suddenly, Batala's cousin remarks, "Too bad. It was a relative." In the film's context, this is taken as a joke (2.10). The shift in the emotion represented in the film catches us off guard. Since these characters are not heartless, we must readjust our reaction to the death and respond as they do—with relief. Estelle's survival is far more important than the death of Batala's child. This is a daring, extreme example, but it dramatically illustrates how the emotions presented onscreen and aroused in us depend on the context created by form.

Form and Meaning

Like emotion, **meaning** is important to our experience of artworks. As viewers we are constantly testing the work for larger significance, for what it says or suggests. And filmmakers often create movies to convey their ideas and opinions. They want us to grasp the meanings they've offered.

What sorts of things might filmmakers and spectators think of as meaningful? Let's look at four remarks we might make about the meaning of *The Wizard of Oz*.

1. **Referential meaning.** *During the Depression, a tornado takes a girl from her family's Kansas farm to the mythical land of Oz. After a series of adventures, she returns home.*

This is very concrete, close to a bare-bones plot summary. Here the meaning depends on the spectator's ability to identify specific items: the hard times of America in the 1930s and features of midwestern climate. A viewer unacquainted with such information would miss some of the meanings cued by the film. We can call such intangible meanings *referential*, since the film refers to things or places already invested with significance in the real world.

A film's subject matter—in *The Wizard of Oz*, American farm life in the 1930s—is often established through referential meaning. And, as you might expect, referential meaning plays a role within the film's overall form. Suppose that instead of having Dorothy live in flat, spare, rural Kansas, the film made Dorothy a child of having Dorothy live in flat, spare, rural Kansas, the film made Dorothy a child of having Dorothy live in a posh section of Beverly Hills. When she got to Oz (transported there, perhaps, by a hillside flash flood), the contrast between the crowded opulence of Oz and her home would not have been nearly as sharp. Here the referential meanings of Kansas and the Great Depression play a definite role in the overall contrast of settings that the film's form creates.

2. **Explicit meaning.** *A girl dreams of leaving home to escape her troubles. Only after she leaves does she realize how much she loves her family and friends. Nothing she finds elsewhere can replace them.*

This assertion is still fairly concrete in the meaning it attributes to the film. If someone were to ask you the *point* of the film—what it seems to be trying to get across—you might answer with something like this. Perhaps you would also mention Dorothy's closing line, "There's no place like home," as a summary of what she has learned. Let's call this sort of openly asserted meaning an *explicit meaning*.

Like referential meanings, explicit meanings function within the film's overall form. They are controlled by context. For instance, we might want to take "There's no place like home" as a statement of the meaning of the entire film. But, first, *why* do we take that as a strongly meaningful line? In ordinary conversation, it's a cliché. In context, however, the line gains great force. It's uttered in close-up, it comes at the end of the film (a formally privileged moment), and it refers back to all of Dorothy's desires and ordeals, recalling the film's narrative movement toward her goal. It is the *form* of the film that gives the homily an unfamiliar weight.

This example suggests that we must examine how explicit meanings in a film interact with other elements of the overall form. Usually, we can't isolate a particularly significant moment and declare it to be *the* meaning of the whole film. Dorothy's "There's no place like home" does capture one meaningful element in *The Wizard of Oz*. But her remark is counterbalanced by the entire beguiling Oz fantasy. Oz is attractive but dangerous; home is drab but safe and loving.

In trying to see the meaningful parts within a larger whole, it's useful to set significant moments against one another. Thus Dorothy's final line could be juxtaposed to the scene of the characters getting spruced up after their arrival at the Emerald City. We can try to see the film as about not only Oz or only Kansas, but rather the relation of the two—the delight and risk of a fantasy world versus the comfort and stability of home. Thus the film's total system is larger than any one explicit meaning we can find in it. Instead of asking, "What is this film's meaning?" we can ask, "How do the various meanings relate to one another?"

3. **Implicit meaning.** *An adolescent who must soon face the adult world yearns for a return to the simplicity of childhood, but she eventually accepts the demands of growing up.*

This is more abstract than the first two remarks we've mentioned. This one suggests that *The Wizard of Oz* is about something general, the passage from childhood to adulthood. On this view, the film implies that, as they grow up, people may want to return to the apparently uncomplicated world of childhood. Dorothy's frustration with her aunt and uncle and her urge to flee to a place "over the rainbow" become examples of a general conception of adolescence. Unlike the "no place like home" line, this meaning isn't stated directly. We can call this suggestion an *implicit meaning*. When perceivers ascribe implicit meanings to an artwork, they're usually said to be *interpreting* it.

Clearly, **interpretations** vary. One viewer might propose that *The Wizard of Oz* is really about adolescence. Another might suggest that it is really about courage and persistence, or that it is a satire on the adult world. One of the appeals of artworks is that they ask us to interpret them in several ways at once. Again, the filmmaker invites us to perform certain activities—here, building up implicit meanings, guided by the film's overall form.

Some filmmakers claim to avoid implicit meanings altogether. They leave them to viewers and critics. Of *There Will Be Blood*, director Paul Thomas Anderson said, "It's a slippery slope when you start thinking about something other than just a good battle between two guys. . . . Tell a nasty story and let the rest take care of itself." But other filmmakers try to steer viewers toward implicit meanings, sometimes called *subtexts*. Robert Zemeckis described his *Forrest Gump* as "a movie about grieving." Director Greg Mottola describes the friends' separation at the end of *Superbad* as having several possible subtexts: "It's homosexual panic or it's bravado or it's all these shades of what young men go through to try to appear a certain way to women and to their peers."

Once we identify a film's meaning, either explicit or implicit, we're often tempted to split up the film into the content portion (the meaning) and the form (the vehicle for the content). Explicit and implicit meanings suggest very broad concepts, often called *themes*. A film may have as its theme courage or the power of faithful love. Such descriptions have some value, but they are very general; hundreds of films fit them. To summarize *The Wizard of Oz* as being simply about the problems of adolescence does not do justice to the specific qualities of the film as an experience. We suggest that the search for implicit meanings should not leave behind the *particular* and *concrete* features of a film.

This isn't to say that we should avoid interpreting films. But we should strive to make our interpretations precise by seeing how each film's thematic meanings are suggested by the film's form. In a narrative film, both explicit and implicit meanings depend on the relations between story and style.

“Critics enable us to see how parts of an artwork serve larger designs. Often this requires that the critics offer interpretations or explications of the larger aims of the work, but these overviews are often introduced, in large measure, in order to explain why the works have the parts they do.”
—Noël Carroll, philosopher of art



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How far can interpretation go? The limits are tested by fans who find a great many implicit and referential meanings in *The Shining*. See our entry "All play and no work? Room 237."

In *The Wizard of Oz*, the Yellow Brick Road has no meaning in and of itself. But if we examine the functions it fulfills in relation to the narrative, the music, the colors, and so on, we can argue that the Yellow Brick Road does suggest meanings. Dorothy's strong desire to go home makes the road represent that desire. At the same time, because it's made of yellow bricks—rare in our everyday world—it partakes of some of the magical qualities of Oz. In a way, the road encapsulates the tension between Oz and Kansas that we see throughout the movie. We want Dorothy to be successful in getting to Oz and going back to Kansas. So the road can suggest the themes of Oz's attraction and the desirability of getting home.

Interpretation need not be an end in itself. It also helps in understanding the overall form of the film. Once we've noticed the Yellow Brick Road as a thematic element, we could analyze its functions in larger patterns. We could see that it gains narrative importance because Dorothy's indecision at a crossroads allows her to meet the Scarecrow. We could work out a color scheme for the film, contrasting the yellow road, the red slippers, the green Emerald City, and so forth. In such ways, when we interpret a film we should try to harmonize the meanings we detect with the film's overall formal development.

4. **Symptomatic meaning.** *In a society in which human worth is measured by money, the home and the family may seem to be the last refuge of human values. This belief is especially strong in times of economic crisis, such as that in the United States in the 1930s.*

Like statement 3, this is abstract and general. It situates the film within a trend of thought that is assumed to be characteristic of American society during the 1930s. The claim could apply equally well to many other films, as well as to many novels, plays, poems, paintings, advertisements, radio shows, political speeches, and a host of cultural products of the period.

But something else is worth noticing about the statement. It treats an explicit meaning in *The Wizard of Oz* ("There's no place like home") as displaying a set of values characteristic of a whole society. We could treat implicit meanings the same way. If we say the film implies something about adolescence as a crucial time of transition, we could suggest that emphasis on adolescence as a special period of life is also a recurrent concern of American society. So, it's possible to understand a film's explicit or implicit meanings as bearing traces of a particular set of social values. We can call this *symptomatic meaning*, and the set of values that get revealed can be considered a social **ideology**.

Symptomatic meanings remind us that meaning of all sorts is largely a social phenomenon. Many meanings of films are ultimately ideological; that is, they spring from systems of culturally specific beliefs about the world. Religious beliefs, political opinions, conceptions of race or gender or social class, even our most deeply seated notions of life's values—all these constitute our ideological frame of reference. We're tempted to think that our beliefs are the best explanations of how the world is. But if we compare our own ideology with that of another culture or time we see how different many of those views are. In other times and places, *home* and *adolescence* don't carry the meanings they carried in 1930s America. Some cultures don't have the idea of adolescence at all.

Films, like other artworks, can be examined for their symptomatic meanings. Again, however, the abstract and general quality of such meanings can lead us away from the film's concrete form. As in analyzing implicit meanings, we should ground symptomatic meanings in the film's specific aspects. A film *enacts* ideological meanings through its form. We'll see in Chapter 11 how the narrative and stylistic system of *Meet Me in St. Louis* and *Raging Bull* can be analyzed for ideological implications.

To sum up: Films have meaning because we attribute meanings to them. Sometimes the filmmaker guides us toward certain meanings; sometimes we find meanings the filmmaker didn't intend. If we're engaged by a film, we'll search for referential, explicit, implicit, and symptomatic meanings. But a film is a film, not

a collection of themes. The filmmaker who wants to make a general statement or suggest implicit meanings will still have to work out the film in concrete terms, through particular choices about form and style. When we look closely at a film, we should keep the same balance in mind, not letting our urge for wider significance outweigh our focus on the film as a dynamic whole.

Evaluation: Good, Bad, or Indifferent?

In talking about an artwork, people often *evaluate* it. They make claims about its goodness or badness. Reviews in print media and on the Internet exist almost solely to tell us whether a film is worth seeing, and our friends often urge us to go to their latest favorite. Some websites rate movies by stars or grades, suggesting that their rankings are fairly precise. What's going on here?

We can start by realizing that there is a difference between *personal taste* and *evaluative judgment*. To say "I liked this film" or "I hated it" is not equal to saying, "It's a good film" or "It's wretched." Most of us want to like good movies and dislike bad ones, but we recognize a range of quality. Very few of us limit our enjoyment to the greatest works. What critics call "guilty pleasures" are movies that are enjoyable despite being bad, maybe even terrible, in some respects.

All this suggests that personal preference need not be the basis for judging a film's quality. Instead, we can try to make a relatively objective evaluation by using specific *criteria*. A criterion is a standard that can be applied in the judgment of many works. By using a criterion, we can compare films for relative quality.

There are many different criteria. Some people evaluate films on *realistic* criteria. Aficionados of military history might judge a film entirely on whether the battle scenes use historically accurate weaponry. Other people condemn films because they don't find the action plausible. They dismiss a scene by saying, "Who'd really believe that X would meet Y just at the right moment?" We have already seen, though, that artworks often violate laws of reality and operate by their own conventions and internal rules. Coincidental encounters, usually at embarrassing moments, are a convention of genres like romantic comedy, as we'll see in Chapter 9. So realism, then, isn't a criterion that we can apply in every case.

Viewers can also use *moral* criteria to evaluate films. Most narrowly, aspects of the film can be judged outside their context in the film. Some viewers might feel that any film with nudity or profanity or violence is bad. Other viewers might defend these aspects as realistic, given the lifestyles of the characters in the story. Likewise, some viewers might condemn Renoir's slightly humorous handling of the baby's death in *The Crime of M. Lange*, regardless of the scene's context. More broadly, viewers and critics may employ moral criteria to evaluate a film's overall significance, and here the film's complete formal system becomes pertinent. We can judge a film good because of its overall view of life, its willingness to show opposing points of view, or its emotional range.

Although realistic and moral criteria are well suited to particular purposes, we should also recognize that there are criteria that assess films as artistic wholes. Such criteria allow us to take each film's form into account as much as possible. *Coherence* is one such criterion. This quality, often referred to as *unity*, has traditionally been held to be a positive feature of artworks. So, too, has *intensity of effect*. If an artwork is vivid, striking, and emotionally engaging, it may be considered more valuable.

Another criterion is *complexity*. We can argue that, all other things being equal, complex films are good. A complex film engages our interest on different levels, and tends to create several patterns of feelings and meanings. Our discussion of *The Wizard of Oz*, so far and going forward, may convince you that it is a more complex film than it might seem at first.

Yet another formal criterion is *originality*. Originality for its own sake is pointless, of course. Just because something is different doesn't mean that it is good. But if an artist takes a familiar convention and uses it in a way that gives viewers a fresh



A CLOSER LOOK

Creative Decisions: Picking Out Patterns

In studying film as an art, you might sometimes wonder: Are all the patterns of form and style we notice really in the film? Do filmmakers actually put them there, or are we just reading them in?

Filmmakers often say that their formal and stylistic choices aim to create specific effects. Hitchcock, a director who had an engineering bent, planned his stories carefully and chose techniques in full awareness of their possibilities. His film *Rope* confines the action to a single apartment and presents it in only eleven shots. *Rear Window* limits the action to what the hero can see from his apartment. In these and other films, Hitchcock deliberately set up constraints for himself, inviting his audience to enjoy the way he worked within them.

Filmmakers may work more intuitively than Hitchcock, but they still must choose one story development or another, one technique or another. The finished film can have an overall unity because the choices tend to mesh. Joel and Ethan Coen, the brothers who created *The Big Lebowski*, *Fargo*, and *True Grit*, don't set out with a particular style in mind. As Ethan puts it, "At the point of making the movie, it's just about making individual choices." Joel picks up the thread:

... about the best way to tell the story, scene by scene. You make specific choices that you think are appropriate or compelling or interesting for that particular scene. Then, at the end of the day, you put it all together and somebody looks at it and, if there's some consistency to it, they say, "Well, that's their style."

Even if the Coens don't map out every option in advance, their films display distinctive patterns of form and style, and those definitely affect our response (2.12, 2.13).

Professionals pay attention to other filmmakers' creative decisions about form and style. While watching Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*, Nicole Kidman pointed out how the composition of one shot had both an immediate point and a long-range story purpose (2.14):

Here, in this scene, look at how there is this rack of knives hanging in the background over the boy's head. . . . It's

"You can take a movie, for example, like *Angels with Dirty Faces*, where James Cagney is a child and says to his pal Pat O'Brien, 'What do you hear, what do you say?'—cocky kid—and then as a young rough on the way up when things are going great for him he says, 'What do you hear, what do you say?' Then when he is about to be executed in the electric chair and Pat O'Brien is there to hear his confession, he says, 'What do you hear, what do you say?' and the simple repetition of the last line of dialogue in three different places with the same characters brings home the dramatically changed circumstances much more than any extensive diatribe would."

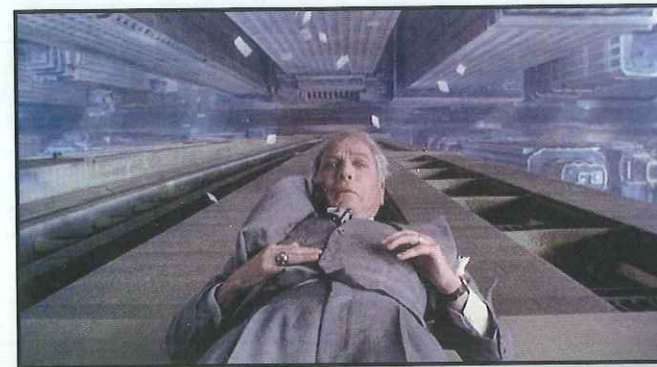
—Robert Towne, screenwriter, *Chinatown*

important because it not only shows that the boy is in danger, but one of those very knives is used later in the story when Wendy takes it to protect herself from her husband (2.15).

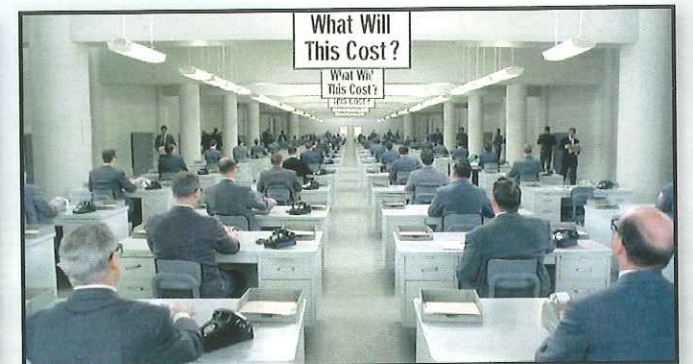
Kubrick told Kidman that a director had to repeat story information so that the audience could keep up. The knife pattern shaped viewers' experience, although they may not have been aware of it.

Kubrick's comment points up another reason we can have some confidence when we pick out patterns. A filmmaker doesn't create a movie from scratch. All films borrow ideas and storytelling strategies from other movies and other art forms. As we've seen, a lot that happens in films is governed by conventions. When Kubrick shows us the knives behind Danny, he's following a very old storytelling convention: prepare the audience for action that will come later. Similarly, *The Hudsucker Proxy* is a satirical comedy, and the steep perspective in 2.12 and 2.13 follows a convention of using exaggeration to create humor.

Very often, patterns in one film resemble patterns we've seen in other films. Even when filmmakers operate intuitively and don't tell us their trade secrets, we can notice how they treat familiar conventions of form and technique.



2.12



2.13

2.12–2.13 Creating a film's style through compositional motifs. In the *Hudsucker Proxy*, the boss dangles above the street in a very steep, centered-perspective composition (2.12). The same sort of composition is used to show the impersonal layout of desks in the Hudsucker company (2.13).



2.14



2.15

2.14–2.15 Motifs anticipate action. In *The Shining*, an early scene in the Hotel Overlook kitchen displays the telepathic rapport between Halloran and Danny, whose parents are caretaking the hotel for the winter. The knives are a natural part of the kitchen set but are aligned above Danny (2.14). Later Danny's mother, Wendy, goes to the same knife rack, seen from a different angle, to grab a weapon (2.15).



2.16



2.17



2.18



2.19

2.16–2.19 Parallels between frame story and fantasy. The itinerant Kansas fortune-teller, Professor Marvel (2.16), bears a striking resemblance to the old charlatan known as the Wizard of Oz (2.17). Miss Gulch's bicycle in the opening section (2.18) becomes the Witch's broom in Oz (2.19).



2.20



2.21

2.20–2.21 Parallel compositions. As the Lion describes his timidity, the characters are lined up (2.20) to form a mirror reversal of the earlier scene in which the others teased Zeke for being afraid of pigs (2.21).

a motif. (See “A Closer Look,” pp. 64–65.) Motifs often reappear at climaxes or highly emotional moments, as happens with the famous line from *Jerry Maguire*, “You complete me.”

Motifs are fairly exact repetitions, but a film can chart broader similarities between its ingredients. To understand *The Wizard of Oz*, we must notice that the three Kansas farmhands have counterparts in the Scarecrow, the Tin Man, and the Cowardly Lion. We must notice additional echoes between characters in the frame story and in the fantasy (2.16–2.19). Such similarities are usually called *parallels*. Parallels cue us to compare two or more distinct elements by highlighting some similarity. For example, Dorothy says she feels that she has known the Scarecrow and the Tin Man before. At another point, the staging of a shot reinforces the parallels (2.20–2.21).

Motifs can help create parallels among characters and situations. The viewer will notice, and even come to expect, that every time Dorothy meets a character in Oz, the scene will end with the song “We’re Off to See the Wizard.” This motif accentuates the broader similarities among Dorothy’s encounters. Our recognition of parallelism provides part of our pleasure in watching a film, much as rhymes contribute to the power of poetry.

Difference and Variation

A filmmaker is unlikely to rely only on repetitions. AAAAAA is rather boring. There should also be some changes, or *variations*, however small. So difference, or variation, is another fundamental principle of film form. We’ve seen this principle at work already, when composer James Newton Howard provided three “movements” for the music accompanying the final scene of *Collateral* (pp. 7–9).



2.22



2.23

2.22–2.23 Contrasting settings. Centered in the upper half of the frame, the Emerald City (2.22) creates a striking contrast to the similar composition showing the castle of the Wicked Witch of the West (2.23).

Differences among the elements are most apparent when characters clash. In *The Wizard of Oz*, Dorothy’s desires are opposed, at various points, by the differing desires of Aunt Em, Miss Gulch, the Wicked Witch, and the Wizard, so that our experience of the film is engaged through dramatic conflict. But character conflict isn’t the only way the formal principle of difference may appear.

If you were making a film, you’d seek out ways to contrast your characters and their environments. Perhaps you’d situate one character in nature and another in busy urban surroundings. You might stress contrasts of costume, or hairstyles, or color. *The Wizard of Oz* presents stark color oppositions: black-and-white Kansas versus colorful Oz; Dorothy in red, white, and blue versus the Witch in black. Settings are opposed as well—not only Oz versus Kansas but also the various locales within Oz (2.22–2.23). Voice quality, musical tunes, and a host of other elements play off against one another, demonstrating that any motif may be opposed by any other motif.

Typically, filmmakers vary their motifs and parallels. In *The Wizard of Oz*, the three Kansas hands aren’t identical to their counterparts in Oz. When Professor Marvel pretends to read Dorothy’s future in a small crystal ball, we see no images in it (2.16). Dorothy’s dream transforms the crystal into a large globe in the Witch’s castle, where it displays frightening scenes (2.24). Similarly, Toto’s disruption of a situation is a constant action motif, but it changes its function. In Kansas, he disturbs Miss Gulch and induces Dorothy to take Toto away from home, but in Oz, his disruption prevents Dorothy from returning home.

Not all differences come down to this-versus-that dualities. Dorothy’s three Oz friends—the Scarecrow, the Tin Woodman, and the Lion—are distinguished by three things they lack (a brain, a heart, and courage). Other films may rely on less sharp differences, suggesting a scale of gradations among the characters, as in Jean Renoir’s *The Rules of the Game*. At the extreme, an abstract film may create minimal variations among its parts, such as in the slight changes that accompany each return of the same footage in J. J. Murphy’s *Print Generation* (p. 372).

Repetition and variation are two sides of the same coin. To notice one is to be alert to the other. In thinking about films, we ought to look for similarities and differences. Shuttling between the two, we can point out motifs and contrast the changes they undergo, recognize parallelisms as repetition, and still spot crucial variations.

Development

One way to notice how similarity and difference operate in film form is to look for principles of *development* from part to part. Development places similar and different elements within a pattern of change. Our pattern ABACA is based not only on repetition (the recurring motif of A) and difference (the insertion of B and C) but



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One distinctive type of film form comes in the anthology film, combining short segments by several directors. It’s a theme-and-variations approach that we discuss in “Can you spot all the auteurs in this picture?”



2.24 Similarity and difference. Through her crystal ball, the Wicked Witch mocks Dorothy. Contrast it with the earlier scene (2.16) in which the Kansas fortune-teller uses a smaller crystal ball.

Earlier, we suggested that film form engages our emotions and expectations in a dynamic way. Now we're in a better position to see why. The filmmaker creates a constant interplay between similarity and difference, and repetition and variation. This process leads the viewer to an active engagement with the film's developing system. It is handy to visualize a movie's development in static terms by segmenting it, but we ought not to forget that formal development is a *process* taking place over time. Form shapes our experience of the film.

Unity and Disunity

When all the relationships we perceive within a film are clear and economically interwoven, we say that the film has **unity**. We often call a unified film "tight," because there seem to be no gaps in its overall form. We feel that every element fulfills particular functions, that we understand the similarities and differences among elements, that the form develops logically, and that no element is superfluous. The film's overall unity can give our experience a sense of completeness and fulfillment.

Unity is a matter of degree. Very few films are perfectly tight. For example, at one point in *The Wizard of Oz*, the Witch refers to her having attacked Dorothy and her friends with insects, yet we have never seen them. What is the Witch referring to? In fact, a bee attack was originally shot but then cut from the finished film. The Witch's line about the insect attack now lacks motivation.

More striking is a dangling element at the film's end: We never find out what happens to Miss Gulch. Presumably, she still has her legal order to take Toto away, but no one refers to this in the last scene. The viewer may be inclined to overlook this disunity because Miss Gulch's parallel character, the Witch, has been killed off in the Oz fantasy, and we don't expect to see her alive again. Since perfect unity is scarcely ever achieved, we ought to expect that even a unified film may still contain a few stray elements or unanswered questions.

If we look at unity as a criterion for evaluation, we may judge a film containing several unmotivated elements as a failure. But unity and disunity may be looked at nonevaluatively as well, as the results of particular formal conventions. For example, *Pulp Fiction* lacks a bit of closure in that it never reveals what is inside the briefcase that is at the center of the gangster plot. The contents, however, give off a golden glow, suggesting that they are of very great value (as well as evoking the "whatsit" in *Kiss Me Deadly*, a classic film noir). By not specifying the goods, the film emphasizes characters' reactions to them. For example, in the last scene in the diner, Pumpkin gazes at the mystery object lustfully but the newly spiritual hit man Jules calmly insists that he will deliver it to his boss. In such ways, momentary disunities can fulfill larger functions.



SUMMARY

A filmmaker designs an experience for an audience by shaping the film's form, the overall pattern of parts. Things that are normally considered content—subject matter, or abstract ideas—take on particular functions within the overall form.

Our experience as viewers is shaped by the filmmaker's formal choices. Through the creative decisions they make, filmmakers nudge or thrust us in certain directions. Picking up cues in the work, we frame specific expectations that are aroused, guided, delayed, cheated, satisfied, or disturbed. We feel curiosity, suspense, and

surprise. We compare the particular aspects of the artwork with things that we know from life and with conventions found in art.

The concrete context of the artwork expresses and stimulates emotions. It enables us to construct many types of meanings. And even when we apply general criteria in evaluating artworks, we ought to use those criteria to help us discriminate more, to probe more deeply into the particular aspects of the artwork. The rest of this book is devoted to studying these properties of artistic form in cinema.

We can summarize the principles of film form as a set of questions that you can ask about any film:

1. For any element in the film, what are its functions in the overall form? How is it motivated?
2. Are elements or patterns repeated throughout the film? If so, how and at what points? Are motifs and parallelisms asking us to compare elements?
3. How are elements contrasted and differentiated from one another? How are different elements opposed to one another?

4. What principles of progression or development are at work through the form of the film? Does a comparison of the beginning and ending point toward the film's overall form?

5. What degree of unity is present in the film's overall form?

In this chapter, we examined some major ways in which films as artworks can engage us as spectators. We also reviewed some broad principles of film form. Armed with these general principles, we can press on to distinguish more specific types of form that are central to understanding film art.

CHAPTER

3

Narrative Form

Humans have an endless appetite for stories. As children, we devour fairy tales and myths; we like to watch the same cartoons over and over. As we get older, we become captivated by other stories—in religion and history, in novels and comic books and video games and, of course, movies. We recount our lives, or just what happened at work today, to anyone who'll listen. Politicians and journalists talk about “changing the narrative.” In the courtroom the jury hears competing stories, and in our dreams we imagine ourselves in scenes and situations. Narrative is a fundamental way that humans make sense of the world.

Stories grab and hold us. In Chapter 2 we considered how a sequence of items, even letters of the alphabet, can prod us to ask what comes next. A story, filled out with characters and their actions, intensifies that urge to the maximum. In 1841, Charles Dickens serialized his novel *The Old Curiosity Shop* in magazine installments. When ships brought the latest installment to America, crowds of readers packed the wharf crying out, “Is Little Nell dead?” Almost two centuries later, children and their parents lined up for hours outside bookstores to buy the newest Harry Potter novel. Many of those youngsters rushed home and started reading it immediately.

They were not that different from fans binge-watching a whole season of a TV show, or from fans eagerly waiting for the next installment of a movie franchise and speculating online about upcoming plot twists. Whether the story is fictional or factual, we feel driven to know how the action develops, how the characters react, and how it all comes out in the end.

Because storytelling is so common and so powerful, we need to take a close look at how films—both fictional and nonfictional—embody **narrative form**.

Principles of Narrative Form

Because stories are all around us, spectators approach a narrative film with definite expectations. We may know a great deal about the particular story the film will tell. Perhaps we've read the book that the film is based on, or this is a sequel to a movie we've seen.

Even if we aren't already acquainted with the story's particular world, though, we have expectations that are characteristic of narrative form itself. We assume that there will be characters and that the actions they take will involve them with one another. We expect a series of incidents that will be connected in some way. We usually expect that the problems or conflicts that arise will somehow be settled—either they will be resolved or, at least, a new light will be cast on them. A spectator comes prepared to make sense of a narrative film.

While watching the film, the viewer picks up cues, recalls information, anticipates what will follow, and generally participates in the creation of the film's form. As we

suggested in Chapter 2 (pp. 54-55), the film shapes our expectations by summoning up curiosity, suspense, surprise, and other emotional qualities. The ending has the task of satisfying or cheating the expectations prompted by the film as a whole. The ending may also activate memory by cueing the spectator to review earlier events, possibly considering them in a new light. When *The Sixth Sense* was released in 1999, many moviegoers were so intrigued by the surprise twist at the end that they returned to see the film again and trace how their expectations had been manipulated. Something similar happened with *The Conversation* (see pp. 300-302). As we examine narrative form, we need to recognize how it engages the viewer in a dynamic activity.

It's the filmmaker's task to create this engagement. How does this happen? We can start to understand the filmmaker's creative choices and the viewer's activity by looking a little more closely at what narrative is and does.

What Is Narrative?

We can consider a *narrative* to be a *chain of events linked by cause and effect and occurring in time and space*. A narrative is what we usually mean by the term “story,” although we'll be using that term in a slightly different way later. Typically, a narrative begins with one situation; a series of changes occurs according to a pattern of cause and effect; finally, a new situation arises that brings about the end of the narrative. Our engagement with the story depends on our understanding of the pattern of change and stability, cause and effect, time and space.

A random string of events is hard to understand as a story. Consider the following actions: “A man tosses and turns, unable to sleep. A mirror breaks. A telephone rings.” We have trouble grasping this as a narrative because we are unable to determine how the events are connected by causality or time or space.

Consider a new description of these same events: “A man has a fight with his boss. He tosses and turns that night, unable to sleep. In the morning, he is still so angry that he smashes the mirror while shaving. Then his telephone rings; his boss has called to apologize.”

We now have a narrative, unexciting though it is. We can connect the events spatially. The man is in the office, then in his bed; the mirror is in the bathroom; the phone is somewhere else in his home. Time is important as well. The fight starts things off, and the sleepless night, the broken mirror, and the phone call occur one after the other. The action runs from one day to the following morning. Above all, we can understand that the three events are part of a pattern of causes and effects. The argument with the boss causes the sleeplessness and the broken mirror. The phone call from the boss resolves the conflict, so the narrative ends. The narrative develops from an initial situation of conflict between employee and boss, through a series of events caused by the conflict, to the resolution of the conflict. Simple and minimal as our example is, it shows how important causality, space, and time are to narrative form.

The fact that a narrative relies on causality, time, and space doesn't mean that other formal principles can't govern the film. For instance, a narrative may make use of parallelism. As Chapter 2 points out (p. 66), parallelism points up a similarity among story elements. Our example was the way *The Wizard of Oz* paralleled the three Kansas farmhands with Dorothy's three Oz companions.

A narrative may cue us to draw parallels among characters, settings, situations, times of day, or any other elements. *Julie & Julia* parallels two women, living in different periods, trying to juggle their marriages and their passion for cuisine (3.1, 3.2). Julie never meets her idol Julia Child, but there is still a cause-effect link: Julie is inspired by the older woman's life. Sometimes a filmmaker goes further and doesn't link the parallel stories causally. Věra Chytilová's *Something Different* alternates scenes from the life of a housewife and scenes from the career of a gymnast. Since the two women lead entirely separate lives, there are no causal connections between them. The parallel patterning encourages us to compare the women's life decisions.

“Narrative is one of the ways in which knowledge is organized. I have always thought it was the most important way to transmit and receive knowledge. I am less certain of that now—but the craving for narrative has never lessened, and the hunger for it is as keen as it was on Mt. Sinai or Calvary or the middle of the fens.”

—Toni Morrison, author, *Beloved*



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When filmmakers create a prequel to an existing film story, they need to weave new patterns of cause and effect that lead to the story we already know. We discuss how prequels manage this task in “Originality and origin stories.”



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We analyze *Julie & Julia* in more depth, along with the parallel plot in *Enchantment*, in “Julie, Julia & the house that talked.”



3.1

3.1–3.2 Narrative parallels. *Julie & Julia*: Staging and composition emphasize similarities between the two women's stories.



3.2

The documentary *Hoop Dreams* makes a similar use of parallels. Two high school students from a black neighborhood in Chicago dream of becoming professional basketball players, and the film follows each one's pursuit of an athletic career. The film's form invites us to compare their personalities, the obstacles they face, and the choices they make. In addition, the film creates parallels between their high schools, their coaches, their parents, and older male relatives who vicariously pursue their own dreams of athletic glory. *Hoop Dreams*, like *Julie & Julia* and *Something Different*, remains a narrative film. Each of the parallel lines of action is organized by time, space, and causality. But parallelism allows the film to become more complex than it might have been had it concentrated on only one protagonist.

Telling the Story

We make sense of a narrative, then, by identifying its events and linking them by cause and effect, time, and space. We also look out for parallels that can shed light on the ongoing action. But there's a lot more to narrative than this bare-bones account. To dig deeper, let's again try to think like a filmmaker.

CREATIVE DECISIONS

How Would You Tell the Story?

You have a story. Let's say it's a romantic comedy following the development of a love affair. Your problem is: How to tell it?

For example, should you start at the beginning of the story, when the partners meet? You could trace the action chronologically from there, showing them falling in love, being separated, meeting other people, reuniting, and eventually being reunited as a couple in marriage. But you might consider another option. Suppose you break chronology and start your film with the couple's wedding day. Then you might flash back to the beginning, showing how they met, and then trace the love affair through its ups and downs.

But why stop your rearranging there? Why not start with the wedding day, flash back to the first meeting, then return to the wedding day, then flash back to the budding romance, then return to the wedding day, and so on? Instead of one long flashback framed by the wedding, you have several shorter ones that keep interrupting the wedding.

Then you might ask: Who says the love-affair flashbacks have to be presented in chronological order? Maybe I can create more curiosity, or suspense, or surprise, or emotional engagement if I show the first meeting later in the film, out of chronological order. Perhaps just before the wedding, or just after their big bust-up? Although one event causes another, you don't have to respect 1-2-3 order.

While you're speculating about shuffling time periods, you might pause again. Wouldn't it be more engaging to start not with the wedding but with the couple's "darkest moment," the scene in which it seems they're never going to get together? Then flashing back to earlier, happier days could increase the suspense. Will they be reunited? That makes the wedding a sort of epilogue rather than the big event framing the overall action.

Each choice brings up further choices. If your flashbacks skip around a lot, you might worry about viewers' losing their bearings. So to help out, you might add superimposed titles identifying the time and place of the scene.

Time structure is only one of the storytelling choices you face. If you're planning the romantic comedy we sketched, from whose viewpoint will the tale be told? You could limit things to one character's standpoint, showing only what she or he knows about the unfolding action. *(500) Days of Summer* puts us firmly with the man who has fallen in love with the mysterious Summer. Alternatively, you could follow the more common convention of showing both members of the couple when they're alone or with other friends. You could mix in scenes of parents, coworkers, and the like. This asks your viewer to see the central relationship in a wider context.

Storytelling decisions about viewpoint involve what we'll be calling *narration*. Whatever the area of choice you face, you'll want to consider how the options affect the viewer. As we saw, presenting the story out of order could trigger curiosity or suspense. Confining us to what one character knows can enhance surprise, so that we learn new information only when he or she does.

Our romantic comedy is deeply unoriginal, but the point is just to show how filmmakers face choices in planning narrative form. Those choices involve time structure, narration, and other possibilities we'll examine.

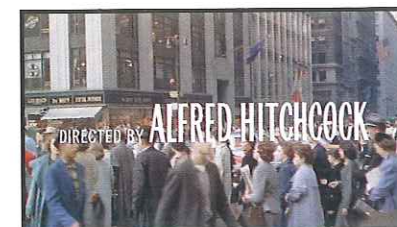
Plot and Story

In our hypothetical movie, the love affair that runs from first meeting to wedding is what we'll be calling the **story**. The story is the chain of events in chronological order. But as we've seen, that story may be presented in various ways. If we use flashbacks instead of linear time, or if we decide to organize events around one character rather than another, or if we make other choices about presentation, we will be creating a different **plot**. As we've just seen, the same story can be presented in different ways—rendered as different plots—and each variant is likely to have different effects on the audience.

As viewers, we have direct access only to the plot that the filmmakers finally decided on. Yet eventually we arrive at an understanding of the underlying story. The filmmakers have built the plot from the story, but viewers build the story from the plot.

How do viewers do that? By making assumptions and inferences about what's presented. At the start of Alfred Hitchcock's *North by Northwest*, we know we are in Manhattan at rush hour. The cues stand out clearly: skyscrapers, bustling pedestrians, congested traffic (3.3). Then we watch Roger Thornhill as he leaves an elevator with his secretary, Maggie, and strides through the lobby, dictating memos (3.4).

Already we can draw some conclusions. Thornhill is an executive who leads a busy life. We assume that before we saw Thornhill and Maggie, he was also dictating to her; we have come in on the middle of a string of events in time. We also assume that the dictating began in the office, before they got on the elevator. In other words, we infer causes, a temporal sequence, and another locale even though none of this information has been directly presented. We're probably not aware of making these inferences, but insofar as we understand what we see and hear, we are making them. The filmmaker has steered us to make them.



3.3



3.4

3.3–3.4 Depicted and inferred story events. Shots of hurrying Manhattan pedestrians in *North by Northwest* are followed by a shot introducing us to Roger Thornhill and his secretary. Viewers make inferences about the story and characters based on the information that is presented onscreen.

So the plot guides the viewer in building up a sense of all the relevant events, both the ones explicitly presented and those that must be inferred. In our *North by Northwest* example, the story would consist of at least two depicted events and two inferred ones. We can list them, putting the inferred events in parentheses:

(Roger Thornhill has a busy day at his office.)

Rush hour hits Manhattan.

(While dictating to his secretary, Maggie, Roger leaves the office, and they take the elevator.)

Still dictating, Roger gets off the elevator with Maggie and they stride through the lobby.

The total world of the story action is sometimes called the film's *diegesis* (the Greek word for "recounted story"). In the opening of *North by Northwest*, the traffic, streets, skyscrapers, and people we see, as well as the traffic, streets, skyscrapers, and people we assume to be offscreen, are all diegetic because they are assumed to exist in the world that the film depicts.

From the viewer's perspective, the *plot* consists of the action visibly and audibly present in the film before us. The plot includes, most centrally, all the story events that are directly depicted. In our *North by Northwest* example, only two story events are explicitly presented in the plot: rush hour and Roger Thornhill's dictating to Maggie as they leave the elevator. The plot also includes the information that characters may supply about earlier events in the story world, as when Roger mentions his many marriages.

Note, though, that the filmmaker may include material that lies *outside* the story world. For example, while the opening of *North by Northwest* is portraying rush hour in Manhattan, we also see the film's credits and hear orchestral music. Neither of these elements is diegetic, since they are brought in from outside the story world. The characters can't read the credits or hear the music.

Credits and a film's score are thus *nondiegetic* elements. Similarly, in silent films, many of the intertitles don't report dialogue but rather comment on the characters or describe the location. These intertitles are nondiegetic. In Chapters 6 and 7, we consider how editing and sound can function nondiegetically.

Suppose Hitchcock had superimposed the words "New York City" over the traffic shots at the start of *North by Northwest*, in the way we considered adding dates to the scrambled scenes of our hypothetical rom-com. Such titles would be nondiegetic as well. (They aren't part of the story world; the characters couldn't read them.) Today superimposed titles are the most common sorts of nondiegetic inserts, but we can find more unusual ones. In *The Band Wagon*, we see the premiere of a hopelessly pretentious musical play. Through nondiegetic images, accompanied by a brooding chorus, the plot signals that the production bombed (3.5–3.9). The filmmakers have added nondiegetic material to the plot for comic effect.

From the standpoint of the filmmaker, the story is the sum total of all the events in the narrative. As the storyteller, you could present some of these events directly (that is, display or mention them in the plot), hint at events that are not presented, and simply ignore other events. For instance, though we learn later in *North by Northwest* that Roger's mother is still close to him, we never learn what happened to his father. You, the filmmaker, could also add nondiegetic material, as in the example from *The Band Wagon*. This is why we can say that the filmmaker makes a story into a plot.

The spectator's task is quite different. All we have before us is the plot—the arrangement of material in the film as it stands. We create the story in our minds, thanks to cues in the plot. And in telling someone about the movie we've just seen, we can summarize it in two ways: We can recap the story, or recap the plot.

We'll see that the story–plot distinction affects all three aspects of narrative: causality, time, and space. Each offers the filmmaker a huge array of choice for guiding the viewer's experience of the film.



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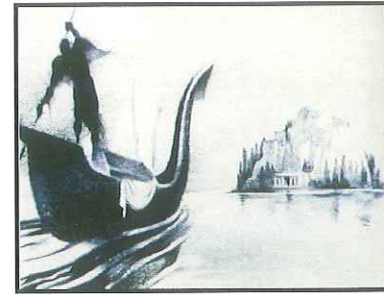
Can you make a plot out of several stories? Yes. "Pulverizing plots: Into the woods with Sondheim, Shklovsky, and David O. Russell" shows how.



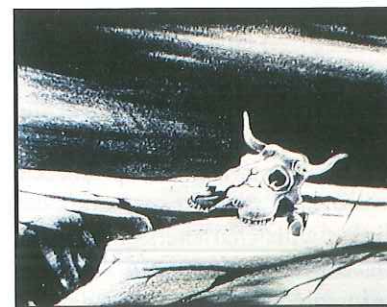
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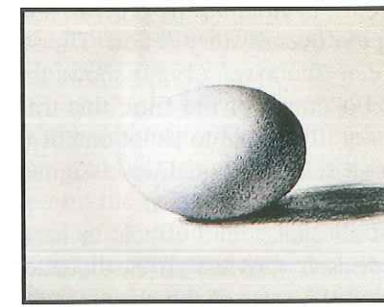
3.6



3.7



3.8



3.9

3.5–3.9 Nondiegetic imagery in *The Band Wagon*. A hopeful investor in the play enters the theater (3.5), and the camera moves in on a poster predicting success for the musical (3.6). But three comic nondiegetic images reveal it to be a flop: ghostly figures on a boat (3.7), a skull in a desert (3.8), and an image referring to the slang expression that the play "laid an egg" (3.9).

Cause and Effect

If narrative depends on changes created by cause and effect, what kinds of things can function as causes? Most often, characters. By triggering events and reacting to them, characters play causal roles within the film's narrative form.

Characters as Causes Most often, characters are persons, or at least entities like persons—Bugs Bunny or E.T. the extraterrestrial or the singing teapot in *Beauty and the Beast*. For our purposes here, Michael Moore is a character in *Roger and Me* no less than Roger Thornhill is in *North by Northwest*, even though Moore is a real person and Thornhill is fictional. In any narrative film, either fictional or documentary, characters create causes and register effects. Within the film's overall form, they make things happen and respond to events. Their actions and reactions contribute strongly to our engagement with the film.

Unlike characters in novels, film characters typically have a visible body. This is such a basic convention that we take it for granted, but it can be contested. Occasionally, a character is only a voice, as in *A Letter to Three Wives*, a film narrated by the woman who has sent a letter to three of her rivals. More disturbingly, in Luis Buñuel's *That Obscure Object of Desire*, one woman is portrayed by two actresses, and the physical differences between them may suggest different sides of her character. Todd Haynes takes this innovation further in *I'm Not There*, in which a folksinger is portrayed by actors of different ages, genders, and races.

Along with a body, a character has *traits*: attitudes, skills, habits, tastes, psychological drives, and any other qualities that distinguish him or her. Some characters, such as Mickey Mouse, may have only a few traits. When we say a character possesses several varying traits, some at odds with others, we tend to call that character complex, or three dimensional, or well developed. Sherlock Holmes, for instance, is a mass of traits. Some stem from his habits, such as his love of music or his addiction to cocaine, while others reflect his basic nature: his arrogance, his penetrating intelligence, his disdain for stupidity, his professional pride, his occasional gallantry.

As our love of gossip shows, we're curious about other humans, and we bring our people-watching skills to narratives. We're quick to assign traits to the characters onscreen, and usually the movie helps us out. Most characters wear their traits far more openly than people do in real life, and the plot presents situations that swiftly reveal them to us.

The opening scene of *Raiders of the Lost Ark* throws Indiana Jones's personality into high relief. We see immediately that he's bold and resourceful, even a little impetuous. He's courageous, but he can feel fear. By unearthing ancient treasures for museums, he shows an admirable devotion to scientific knowledge. In a few minutes, his essential traits are presented straightforwardly, and we come to know and sympathize with him.

All the traits that Indiana Jones displays in the opening scene are relevant to later scenes in *Raiders*. In general, a character is given traits that will play causal roles in the overall story action. The second scene of Alfred Hitchcock's *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1934) shows that the heroine, Jill, is an excellent shot with a rifle. For much of the film, this trait seems irrelevant to the action, but in the last scene, Jill is able to shoot one of the villains when a police marksman cannot manage it. Like most qualities assigned to characters, Jill's marksmanship serves a particular narrative function.

Not all causes and effects in narratives originate with characters. In the so-called disaster movies, an earthquake or tidal wave may precipitate a series of actions on the parts of the characters. The same principle holds when the shark in *Jaws* terrorizes a community. Still, once these natural occurrences set the situation up, human desires and goals usually enter the action to develop the narrative. In *Jaws*, the townspeople pursue a variety of strategies to deal with the shark, propelling the plot as they do so. The primary cause of the action in *Contagion* is a lethal virus spreading across the world, but the action concentrates on individual researchers struggling to find an antidote and on ordinary citizens trying to survive.

Hiding Causes, Hiding Effects As viewers we try to connect events by means of cause and effect. Given an incident, we tend to imagine what might have caused it or what it might in turn cause. That is, we look for causal motivation. We have mentioned an instance of this in Chapter 2: In the scene from *My Man Godfrey*, a scavenger hunt serves as a cause that justifies the presence of a beggar at a society ball (see p. 63).

Causal motivation often involves the planting of information in advance of a scene, as we saw in the kitchen scene of *The Shining* (2.14, 2.15). In *L.A. Confidential*, the idealistic detective Exley confides in his cynical colleague Vincennes that the murder of his father had driven him to enter law enforcement. He had privately named the unknown killer "Rollo Tomasi," a name that he has turned into an emblem of all unpunished evil. This conversation may seem to offer only an insight into Exley's personality. Yet later, when the corrupt police chief Smith shoots Vincennes, the latter mutters "Rollo Tomasi" with his last breath. Later, the puzzled Smith asks Exley who Rollo Tomasi is. Exley's earlier conversation with Vincennes motivates his shocked realization that the dead Vincennes has fingered Smith as his killer. Near the end, when Smith is about to shoot Exley, Exley says that the chief is Rollo Tomasi. Thus an apparently minor detail returns as a major causal and thematic motif.

Most of what we have said about causality pertains to the plot's direct presentation of causes and effects. In *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, Jill is shown to be a good shot, and because of this, she can save her daughter. But the plot can also lead us to *infer* causes and effects, and thus build up a total story.

Consider the mystery story. A murder has been committed. That is, we know an effect but not the causes—the killer, the motive, and perhaps also the method. The mystery tale thus depends strongly on curiosity. We want to know about things that happened before the events that the plot presents to us. It's the detective's job

to disclose, at the end, the missing causes—to name the killer, explain the motive, and reveal the method. That is, in the detective film, the climax of the plot (the action we see) is a revelation of prior incidents in the story (events we didn't see).

Although this pattern is most common in detective narratives, any film's plot can withhold causes and thus arouse our curiosity. Horror and science fiction films often leave us temporarily in the dark about what forces lurk behind certain events. Not until three-quarters of the way through *Alien* do we learn that the science officer Ash is a robot conspiring to protect the creature. In *Caché*, a married couple receives an anonymous videotape recording their daily lives. The film's plot shows them trying to discover who made it and why it was made. In general, whenever any film creates a mystery, the plot initially suppresses certain story causes and presents only enigmatic effects.

The plot may also present causes but withhold story *effects*, prompting suspense and uncertainty in the viewer. After Hannibal Lecter's attack on his guards in the Tennessee prison in *The Silence of the Lambs*, the police search of the building raises the possibility that a body lying on top of an elevator is the wounded Lecter. After an extended suspense scene, we learn that Lecter has switched clothes with a dead guard and escaped.

When a plot withholds crucial consequences at the ending, it can ask us to ponder possible outcomes. In the final moments of François Truffaut's *The 400 Blows*, the boy Antoine has escaped from a reformatory and runs to the seashore. The camera zooms in on his face, and the frame freezes (3.10). The plot does not reveal if Antoine is captured and brought back, leaving us to speculate on what might happen in his future. As in *Rome Open City* (pp. 478–479), the story of *400 Blows* is, by the conventions of mainstream cinema, incomplete.



3.10 Withholding story effects. The final image of *The 400 Blows* leaves Antoine's future uncertain.

Time

Causes and their effects are basic to narrative, but they take place in time. Our story–plot distinction helps us to understand how filmmakers use narrative form to manipulate time.

As we watch a film, we construct story time on the basis of what the plot presents. For instance, a plot may present story events out of chronological order. In *Citizen Kane*, we see a man's death before we see his youth, and we must build up a chronological version of his life. Even if events are shown in chronological order, most plots don't show every detail from beginning to end. We assume that the characters spend uneventful time sleeping, eating, traveling, and so forth, so the periods containing such irrelevant action can be skipped over. Another possibility is to have the plot present the same story event more than once, as when a character recalls a traumatic incident. In John Woo's *The Killer*, an accident in the opening scene blinds a singer, and later we see the same event again and again as the protagonist regretfully thinks back to it.

In short, filmmakers must decide how the film's plot will treat chronological order and temporal duration and frequency. In turn, the viewer must actively pick up the cues about these time-based factors. Each one harbors important artistic possibilities.

Temporal Order: How Are Events Sequenced? Filmmakers can choose to present events out of story order. A flashback, like the ones we proposed for our hypothetical romantic comedy, is simply a portion of the story that the plot presents out of chronological sequence. In *Edward Scissorhands*, we first see the Winona Ryder character as an old woman telling her granddaughter a bedtime story. Most of the film then shows events that occurred when the old lady was in high school. Likewise,

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For examples of plots that keep causes secret from the audience, see "Side effects, safe haven: Out of the past" and "Gone grrrl."



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Mark Romanek learned the D.O.A. lesson in directing *One Hour Photo*. "Creating suspense through film form" discusses how, after preview screenings fizzled, Romanek rearranged his plot to start late in the story action and to flash back to the beginning. "Now the audience is paying closer attention."

The Hangover starts at a point of crisis, when the bridegroom's buddies report that he's missing. The plot then flashes back to them assembling for their bachelor party.

Flashbacks usually don't confuse us, because we mentally rearrange the events into chronological order: teenage years precede old age, the hangover comes after a night of partying. If story events can be thought of as 1-2-3-4, then the plot that uses a *flashback* presents something like 2-1-3-4, or 3-1-2-4. The filmmaker can also shuffle story order by employing a *flashforward*. This pattern moves from present to future, then back to the present, and could be represented as 1-2-4-3. In either case, given the plot order we figure out story order.

Even a simple reordering of scenes can create complex effects. The plot of Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* begins with a couple deciding to rob the diner they're sitting in. This scene actually takes place somewhat late in the story's chronology, but the viewer doesn't learn this until the final scene. At that point, the robbery interrupts a dialogue involving other, more central, characters eating in the same diner. Just by taking a scene that occurs late in the story and placing it at the start of the plot, Tarantino creates a surprise that maintains our interest through the film's last moments.

Tarantino was influenced by the film noir trend of the 1940s and 1950s, which exploited time ordering in ingenious ways. *D.O.A.* (1949) shows how flashbacks can shape the viewer's expectations across a whole film. A man strides into a police station to report a murder. "Who was murdered?" asks the officer. The man replies: "I was." As he starts to explain, we move into an extended flashback. The earliest story action in the past is rather innocuous and slowly paced. Had the plot presented the story in chronological order, viewers might have found these scenes flat. But knowing that the protagonist is dying makes us vigilant. Every encounter he has puts us on the alert: Is this what will kill him? Our anticipation wouldn't have been aroused so keenly if the story had been told in 1-2-3 order.

Temporal Duration: How Long Do the Events Take? The plot of *North by Northwest* presents four crowded days and nights in the life of Roger Thornhill. But the story stretches back far before that, indicated by the information about the past that is revealed in the course of the plot. The story events include Roger's past marriages, the U.S. Intelligence Agency's plot to create a false agent named George Kaplan, and the villain Van Damm's smuggling activities.

In general, a film's plot selects only certain stretches of story **duration**. As a filmmaker you might decide to concentrate on a short, relatively cohesive time span, as *North by Northwest* does. Or you might let your plot unfold across many years, highlighting significant stretches of time in that period. *Citizen Kane* shows us the protagonist in his youth, skips over some time to show him as a young man, skips over more time to show him middle-aged, and so forth. The sum of all these slices of *story duration* yields an overall *plot duration*.

But we need one more distinction. Watching a movie takes time—20 minutes or two hours or seven-plus hours (as Béla Tarr's *Satan's Tango* does). So there's a third duration involved in a narrative film, which we can call *screen duration*.

The relationships among story duration, plot duration, and screen duration are complicated, but for our purposes, we can say this. The filmmaker can manipulate screen duration independently of the overall story duration and plot duration. For example, *North by Northwest* has an overall story duration of several years (including all relevant story events), an overall plot duration of four days and nights, and a screen duration of about 136 minutes.

Just as plot duration selects from story duration, so screen duration selects from overall plot duration. In *North by Northwest*, only portions of the plot's four days and nights are shown to us. An interesting counterexample is *Twelve Angry Men*, the story of a jury deliberating a murder case. The 95 minutes of the movie approximate the same stretch of time in its characters' lives.

At a more specific level, the filmmaker can use screen duration to override story time. For example, screen duration can *expand* story duration. A famous

instance is that of the raising of the bridges in Sergei Eisenstein's *October*. Here an event that takes only a few moments in the story is stretched out to several minutes of screen time by means of the technique of film editing. As a result, this action gains a tremendous emphasis. The plot can also use screen duration to compress story time. A process taking hours or days is often condensed into a few swift shots. These examples suggest that film techniques play a central role in creating screen duration, and we'll see how in Chapters 5 and 6.

Temporal Frequency: How Often Do We See or Hear an Event?

Most commonly, a story event is presented only once in the plot. Occasionally, however, a single story event may appear twice or even more in the plot treatment. If we see an event early in a film's plot, and then, later in the plot, there is a flashback to that event, we see that same event twice. Some films use multiple narrators, each of whom describes the same event; again, we see it take place several times. This increased **frequency** may allow us to see the same action in several ways. Repetition can take place simply on the soundtrack. Sometimes only a single line of dialogue will reappear, haunting a character who can't escape the memory of that moment.

Why would a filmmaker want to repeat a story event in the plot? Sometimes it's to remind the audience of something. Or the repetition reveals new information. This occurs in *For a Few Dollars More*, in which the repeated scene gets expanded more fully each time that characters recall it. In *Amores Perros*, a traffic accident is shown three times, and each iteration reveals how a different person is affected by the crash.

The manipulations of story order, duration, and frequency in the plot illustrate how viewers actively participate in making sense of the narrative film. The filmmaker designs the plot to prompt us about chronological sequence, the time span of the actions, and the number of times an event occurs. It's up to the viewer to make assumptions and inferences and to form expectations. Fortunately, we can usually put things together by appealing to our ordinary sense of time and cause and effect. A flashback, for instance, is often motivated as a character's memory. Other cues, such as clothing, age, settings, and the like can help us sort out a film's story time.

Still, some filmmakers have offered quite complicated time schemes. In *The Usual Suspects*, a petty criminal spins an elaborate tale of his gang's activities to an FBI agent. His recounting unfolds in many flashbacks, some of which repeat events we witnessed in the opening scene. Yet a final twist reveals that some of the flashbacks must have contained lies, and we must piece together both the chronology of events and the story's real cause-effect chain. Christopher Nolan's *Inception* creates several stories-within-stories, all unfolding simultaneously in dream-time, but the plot makes each one take place at a different rate. One second in one dream might last many minutes in another, so that we have several scales of plot duration. Through magic, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* permits action we've already seen to run again, with different results (3.11).



3.11 Creating complex time schemes. In *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, Harry and his friend Hermione use a magical device to go back in time. Here they watch themselves playing out the action from a scene we had witnessed earlier in the film.



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A repeated scene is used to convey fuller story information at the climax of *Mildred Pierce*. To accomplish this, however, the film plays a further trick with story time. See our "Twice told tales: *Mildred Pierce*." Repetition may mislead us in other ways, as we try to show in "Memories are unmade by this."

“The multiple points of view replaced the linear story. Watching a repeated action or an intersection happen again and again . . . they hold the audience in the story. It's like watching a puzzle unfold.”

—Gus van Sant, director, on *Elephant*



A CLOSER LOOK

Playing Games with Story Time

For both filmmakers and viewers, reconstructing story time on the basis of the plot might be seen as a sort of game. Most Hollywood films make this game fairly simple. Still, just as we enjoy learning the rules of new games, in unusual films, we can enjoy the challenge of unpredictable orderings of story events.

Pulp Fiction (1994) popularized “broken timelines” for a new generation of filmmakers and moviegoers. The film’s plot begins and ends with stages of a restaurant holdup, seemingly a conventional frame situation in the present. Yet in fact the final event in the story, the flight of the Bruce Willis character and his girlfriend from Los Angeles, is not the final scene in the plot. The reordering of events is startling and confusing at first, but it becomes dramatically effective in forcing us to rethink scenes we have seen earlier.

The success of *Pulp Fiction* encouraged American filmmakers to play more freely with story time. *Go* (1999) presents the events of a single night three times, each time from a different character’s point of view. We cannot figure out what happened until the end, since various events are withheld from the first version and shown in the second or third. Ten years later, audiences had become quite familiar with such “replay” plots. *Vantage Point* repeats an assassination and bombing, with each version clarifying a bit more of what actually happened in the story.

Replay plots can tease the viewer into fitting everything together. *Out of Sight* begins with an inept bank robber who falls in love with the FBI agent who pursues him. As their oddball romance proceeds, there is a string of flashbacks not motivated by any character’s memory. These seem to involve a separate story line, and their purpose is puzzling until the film’s second half. Then the last flashback, perhaps a character’s recollection, loops back to the action that had begun the film and explains the main events. As often happens, the filmmaker uses cause-effect cues to help the viewer straighten out the broken timeline.

If replay films work to tease us with what happened in the past, filmmakers can use science fiction or fantasy premises to present alternative futures. These are sometimes called “what if?” narratives. Such films typically present a situation, then show how the story might proceed along different cause-effect chains if one factor is changed.

Sliding Doors shows the heroine, Helen, fired from her job and heading home to her apartment, where her boyfriend is in bed with another woman. We see Helen entering the subway and catching her train, but then the action runs backward and she arrives on the platform again, this time bumping into a child on the stairs and missing the train. The rest of the film’s plot moves between two alternative futures for Helen. By catching the train, Helen arrives in time to discover her boyfriend’s affair and moves out. By missing the train, Helen arrives after the

other woman has left and stays with her faithless lover. The plot shifts back and forth between these alternative cause-effect chains before dovetailing them at the end.

Groundhog Day (1993) helped popularize what-if plots. On February 1, an obnoxious weatherman, Phil Connor, travels to Punxsutawney to cover the famous Groundhog Day ceremonies. He then finds himself trapped in February 2, which repeats over and over. The variants depend on how Phil acts—some days behaving frivolously, some days breaking laws (3.12, 3.13), and later trying to improve himself. Only after many such days does he become an admirable character, and the repetitions mysteriously stop.

Neither *Sliding Doors* nor *Groundhog Day* provides any explanation for the forking of its protagonist’s life into various paths. We simply must assume that some higher power has intervened to improve the character’s situation. Other films motivate the alternative futures by a piece of technology. The three *Back to the Future* films (1985, 1989,



3.12



3.13

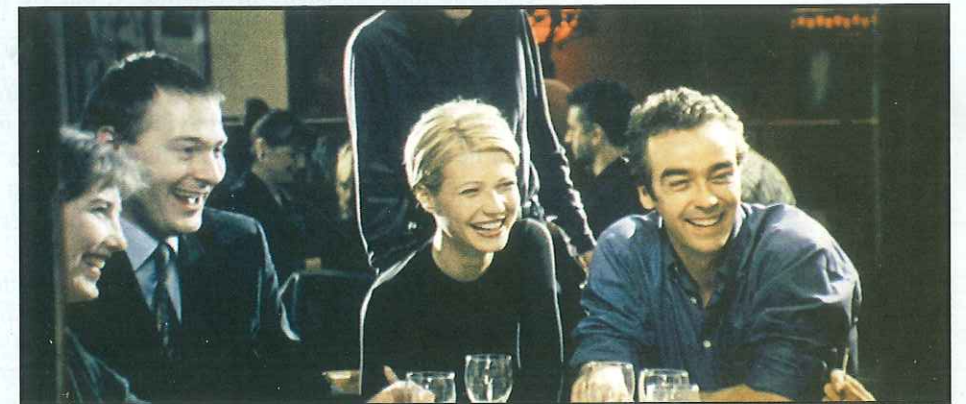
3.12–3.13 “What if?” narrative—replaying the same day. During one repetition of February 2 in *Groundhog Day*, Phil tests whether he can commit crimes. He’s tossed in jail in the evening (3.12), only to wake up, as on other Groundhog Days, back at the bed-and-breakfast inn (3.13).

1990) posit that Marty’s friend Doc has invented a time-travel machine, and this gadget permits complicated criss-crossings of cause and effect. In the first film, the machine accidentally transports Marty back to 1955. By accidentally thwarting his parents’ romance, Marty endangers his own existence in 1985. Eventually, Marty induces his parents to fall in love and returns safely to 1985, where his life has been improved as a result of his first time trip.

But in the second *Back to the Future* installment, events in Marty’s life in 2015 have effects in 1955. The villain Biff uses the time machine to travel back and change what happened then. In the process he wreaks harm on Doc and Marty’s family. Marty must again travel back to 1955 to stop Biff from changing events. At the end of Part II, Marty becomes trapped in 1955, while Doc is accidentally sent back to 1885. Marty joins him there in Part III for another set of threatened changes to the future. Although the films maintain a unified cause-effect chain, the story becomes so convoluted that at one point Doc diagrams events for Marty (and us) on a blackboard. Variations on Doc’s time-machine device for creating alternative futures can be found in *Déjà vu*, *Source Code*, and *Project Almanac*.

The game of what-if emerged outside the United States as well. In *Run Lola Run*, the heroine’s desperate attempts to replace a large sum that her inept boyfriend owes to drug dealers are shown as three alternative stories. Each one ends very differently because of small changes of action on Lola’s part.

Although what-if premises make it more difficult for us to piece story events together, filmmakers usually give us enough clues along the way to keep us from frustration. Usually, the film does not provide a huge number of alternative futures—perhaps only two or three. Within these futures, the cause-effect chain remains linear, so we can piece it together. Characters sometimes point out the events that have changed their lives, as with Doc’s blackboard explanation in *Back to the Future II*. In *Sliding Doors*, Helen remarks: “If only I had just caught that bloody train, it’d never have happened.” The characters and settings tend to remain quite consistent for all the alternative story lines—though often differences of appearance are introduced to help us keep track of events (3.14, 3.15).



3.14



3.15

3.14–3.15 Cues for alternative futures in *Sliding Doors*. In one story line Helen gets her hair cut short (3.14). This helps distinguish her from the Helen of the other story line, who keeps her hair long (3.15). Before the haircut, a forehead bandage was a crucial cue.



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We examine what-if narratives in “Forking tracks: *Source Code*” and “What-if movies: Forking paths in the drawing room.” *Inception* presents a complex plot involving dreams within dreams. We look at its exposition, motivation, and embedded plotlines in “*Inception*: Dream a little dream within a dream with me” and a follow-up, “Revisiting *Inception*.”

Moreover, the individual story lines tend to parallel one another. In all three presentations of events in *Run Lola Run*, the goal of getting money is the same, even though the progression and outcomes are different. The final version of events tends to give us the impression of being the definitive one, and so what-if films usually achieve a sense of closure.

Replay and what-if films appeal to the way we think in ordinary life. Our minds sometimes revisit certain events, and we speculate about how our lives would have changed if a single moment had been different. We easily understand the sort of game that these films proffer, and we’re willing to play it.



A CLOSER LOOK

Continued

More and more, however, *puzzle films* have denied us this degree of unity and clarity. Here filmmakers create perplexing patterns of story time or causality, trusting that viewers will search for clues by rewatching the movie. An example is *Memento*, which presents the hero's investigation along two time tracks. Brief black-and-white scenes show an ongoing present, with story action moving forward chronologically. The more extensive scenes, which are in color, move *backward* through time, so the first plot event we see is the final story event, the second plot event is the next-to-last story event, and so on. This tactic reflects the hero's loss

of short-term memory, but it also challenges viewers to piece everything together. At the same time, there are enough uncertainties about the hero's memories to lead viewers to speculate that some mysteries remain unresolved at the close.

The DVD format, which allows random access to scenes, encouraged filmmakers along this path. So did the Internet. Websites still buzz with speculations about what really happened in *Donnie Darko*, *Identity*, *Primer*, *The Butterfly Effect*, and *Inception*. Like other films that twist or break up story time, puzzle movies seek to engross us in the dynamic game of narrative form.

Space

In film narrative, space is usually an important factor. Events occur in particular locales, such as Kansas or Oz; the Flint, Michigan, of *Roger and Me*; or the Manhattan of *North by Northwest*. We'll consider setting in more detail when we examine *mise-en-scene* in Chapter 4, but we ought briefly to note how plot and story can manipulate space.

Normally, the locale of the story action is also that of the plot, but sometimes the plot leads us to imagine story spaces that are never shown. In Otto Preminger's *Exodus*, one scene is devoted to Dov Landau's interrogation by a terrorist organization he wants to join. Dov reluctantly tells his questioners of his duties in a Nazi concentration camp (3.16). Although the film never shows this locale through a flashback, much of the scene's emotional power depends on our using our imagination to fill in Dov's sketchy description of how he survived.

Further, we can introduce an idea akin to the concept of screen duration. Besides story space and plot space, cinema employs screen space: the visible space within the frame. Just as screen duration selects certain plot spans for presentation, so screen space selects portions of plot space. We'll consider screen space and offscreen space when we analyze framing in Chapter 5.



3.16 Imagining offscreen locales. In *Exodus*, Dov Landau recounts his traumatic stay in a concentration camp. Instead of presenting this through a flashback, the narration dwells on his face, leaving us to visualize his ordeal.

Openings, Closings, and Patterns of Development

Our early experiment in romantic-comedy plotting began with beginnings and endings: How will you start your film? How will you conclude it? This echoed our discussion of formal development in Chapter 2, where we suggested that it's often useful to compare beginnings and endings. A narrative usually presents a series of changes from an initial situation to a final situation, and by considering how that pattern works, we can better understand the film.

Openings A film does not just start, it *begins*. The opening provides a basis for what is to come and initiates us into the narrative. It raises our expectations by setting up a specific range of possible causes for what we see. Indeed, the first quarter or so of a film's plot is sometimes referred to as the *setup*.

Very often, the film begins by telling us about the characters and their situations before any major actions occur. Alternatively, the plot may seek to arouse curiosity by bringing us into a series of actions that has already started. (This is called opening *in medias res*, a Latin phrase meaning "in the middle of things.") The viewer speculates on possible causes of the events presented. *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* begins with investigators arriving in the desert to study World War II airplanes. An *in medias res* opening grabs our interest, but as Robert Towne notes (p. 51), sooner or later the filmmaker has to explain what led up to these events.

In either case, some of the actions that took place before the plot started—often called the *backstory*—will be stated or suggested so that we can understand what's coming later. The portion of the plot that lays out the backstory and the initial situation is called the *exposition*. Usually exposition takes place early in the film, but the filmmaker may postpone chunks of exposition for the sake of suspense and more immediate impact. James Cameron and Gale Anne Hurd did this in their screenplay for *The Terminator*. For nearly 40 minutes the plot provides chases, gunplay, and glimpses of a war-torn future before the fighter Reese explains what has caused the plight that he and Sarah Connor are in.

Development Sections As a film's plot proceeds, the causes and effects create patterns of development. Some patterns are quite common. Change is essential to narrative, and a common pattern traces a *change in knowledge*. Very often, a character learns something in the course of the action, with the most crucial knowledge coming at the final turning point of the plot. In *Witness*, John Book, hiding out on an Amish farm, learns that his partner has been killed and his boss has betrayed him. His rage leads to a climactic shoot-out.

Another common pattern of development is the *goal-oriented* plot, in which a character takes steps to achieve an object or condition. Plots based on *searches* would be instances of the goal plot. In *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, the protagonists try to find the Ark of the Covenant; in *North by Northwest*, Roger Thornhill looks for George Kaplan. The goal-oriented plot pattern often takes the shape of *investigation*, itself a kind of search. Here the protagonist's goal is not an object, but information, usually about mysterious causes.

Time may also provide plot patterns. A framing situation in the present may initiate a series of flashbacks showing how events led up to the present situation, as in *The Usual Suspects*' flashbacks. *Hoop Dreams* is organized around the two main characters' high school careers, with each part of the film devoted to a year of their lives. The plot may also create a specific duration for the action—a *deadline*. In *Back to the Future*, the hero must synchronize his time machine with a bolt of lightning at a specific moment in order to return to 1985. This creates a goal toward which he must struggle. Space can structure plot development, too. The filmmaker might confine the action to a single locale, such as a home (as in the *Paranormal Activity* films). In *Lebanon*, the action is restricted to the inside of a military tank, and the plot develops as the tank moves to different locations. Similarly, in *Locke*, after a brief introduction the plot attaches us to



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Sometimes a film's opening will signal that we are not going to get much exposition. See "How to watch an art movie, reel 1."

“No exposition except under heat, and break it up at that.”
—Raymond Chandler, novelist and screenwriter for *Double Indemnity*



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Some filmmakers develop their plot in large blocks—more or less self-contained episodes or “chapters.” We discuss this strategy in “The 1940s are over, and Tarantino’s still playing with blocks.”



3.17 Time and space in plot patterning. In *Mr. Hulot's Holiday*, Hulot's aged, noisy car has a flat tire that breaks up a funeral—consistent with a comic pattern in which the vacationing Mr. Hulot repeatedly disturbs townspeople and other guests.

the protagonist during his long car drive; the drama arises from several phone calls he conducts on the trip.

A filmmaker can combine any of these plot patterns. Many films built around a journey, such as *The Wizard of Oz* or *North by Northwest*, also involve deadlines. Jacques Tati's *Mr. Hulot's Holiday* uses both spatial and temporal patterns to structure its comic plot. The plot confines itself to a beachside resort and its neighboring areas, and it consumes one week of a summer vacation. Each day certain routines recur: morning exercise, lunch, afternoon outings, dinner, evening entertainment. Much of the film's humor relies on the way that Mr. Hulot disrupts the routines of the guests and townspeople (3.17). Although cause and effect still operate in *Mr. Hulot's Holiday*, time and space are central to the plot's formal patterning.

Any pattern of development will encourage the viewer to create specific expectations. As the film trains the viewer in its particular form, these expectations become more and more precise. Dorothy's trip through Oz isn't a casual sightseeing tour. Once we understand her desire to

go home, each step of her journey (to the Emerald City, to the Witch's castle, to the Emerald City again) is seen as delaying or furthering her goal.

In any film, the middle portion may delay an expected outcome. When Dorothy at last reaches the Wizard, he sets up a new obstacle for her by demanding the Witch's broom. *North by Northwest's* journey plot constantly postpones Roger Thornhill's discovery of the Kaplan hoax, and this, too, creates suspense. The pattern of development may also create surprise, the cheating of an expectation, as when Dorothy discovers that the Wizard is a fraud or when Thornhill sees the minion Leonard fire point-blank at his boss Van Damm. Patterns of development encourage the spectator to form long-term expectations that can be delayed, cheated, or gratified.

Climaxes and Closings A film doesn't simply stop; it *ends*. The plot will typically resolve its causal issues by bringing the development to a high point, or *climax*. In the climax, the action is presented as having a narrow range of possible outcomes. At the climax of *North by Northwest*, Roger and Eve are dangling off Mount Rushmore, and there are only two possibilities: they will fall, or they will be saved.

Because the climax focuses possible outcomes so narrowly, it typically serves to settle the causal issues that have run through the film. In the documentary *Primary*, the climax takes place on election night; both Kennedy and Humphrey await the voters' verdict and finally learn the winner. In *Jaws*, battles with the shark climax in the destruction of the boat, the death of Captain Quint, the apparent death of Hooper, and Brody's final victory. In such films, the ending resolves, or closes off, the chains of cause and effect.

Emotionally, the climax aims to lift the viewer to a high degree of tension. Because the viewer knows that there are relatively few ways the action can be resolved, she or he can hope for a fairly specific outcome. When Brody slays the shark and discovers that Hooper has survived, their relief echoes ours. In the climax of many films, formal resolution coincides with an emotional satisfaction.

A few narratives, however, are deliberately anticlimactic. After creating expectations about how the cause-effect chain will be resolved, the film scotches them by refusing to settle things definitely. One famous example is the last shot of *The 400 Blows* (p. 79). In Michelangelo Antonioni's *L'Eclisse* ("The Eclipse"), the two lovers vow to meet for a final reconciliation but aren't shown doing so. When the filmmaker has chosen to let the ending remain open, the plot leaves us uncertain about the final consequences of the story events. The absence of a clear-cut climax and resolution may encourage us to imagine what might happen next or to reflect on other ways in which our expectations might have been fulfilled.



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How do we learn to recognize that an ending is coming? Starting from an anecdote about a three-year-old watching *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, we speculate on this subject in "Molly wanted more."



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A film is constantly giving us story information. How much do we remember, scene by scene? Some filmmakers exploit our difficulties in remembering what happened earlier, as we show in "Memories are unmade by this."

Narration: The Flow of Story Information

In looking at how a filmmaker tells a story, we've emphasized matters of plot structure: how the parts, from beginning to end, are fitted together to shape the viewer's experience. Filmic storytelling involves decisions about another sort of plot organization. Back when we were sketching alternatives for a romantic comedy (p. 74), we also faced the question of whether to build the scenes around one member of the couple, both members, or the couple and other characters around them. We could tell the same story from different characters' perspectives. The story of Little Red Riding Hood will be very different depending on whether we attach ourselves to the girl or to the wolf.

This means deciding what information to give the spectator, and when to supply it. Thinking like a filmmaker, should you restrict the viewer just to what the character knows? Or should you give the viewer more information than the character has? In a stalking scene, should you show just the person being pursued, watching and listening for a threat we never see? Or should you show both the victim shrinking away and the stalker in pursuit? There is no right or wrong answer. The choice depends on the effect you want to achieve. What is clear is that a filmmaker can't avoid choosing how much information to reveal and when to reveal it.

Similarly, you might ask how objective or subjective your scene should be. Should you show only how characters behave, without any attempt to get inside their heads? Or should you add voice-over monologues that expose what they're thinking, or point-of-view shots that show what they can see? Should you try to dramatize their dreams, fantasies, or hallucinations? Again, it's a forced choice, and again you can imagine presenting the same story in a plot that is deeply subjective or one that is more objective.

These decisions involve **narration**, the plot's way of distributing story information in order to achieve specific effects. Narration is the moment-by-moment process that guides viewers in building the story out of the plot. Many factors enter into narration, but the most important ones for our purposes involve the factors we've just sketched out: the *range* and the *depth* of story information that the plot presents.

Range of Story Information: Restricted or Unrestricted?

D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* begins by recounting how slaves were brought to America and how people debated the need to free them. The plot then shows two families, the northern Stoneman family and the southern Camerons. The plot also dwells on political matters, including Lincoln's hope of averting civil war. From the start, then, our range of knowledge is very broad. The plot takes us across historical periods, regions of the country, and various groups of characters. This breadth of story information continues throughout the film. When Ben Cameron founds the Ku Klux Klan, we know about it at the moment the idea strikes him, long before the other characters learn of it. At the climax, we know that the Klan is riding to rescue several characters besieged in a cabin, but the besieged people do not know this.

On the whole, in *The Birth of a Nation*, the narration is *unrestricted*. We know more, we see and hear more, than any of the characters can. Such extremely knowledgeable narration is often called *omniscient* ("all-knowing") narration.

Now consider the plot of Howard Hawks's *The Big Sleep*. The film begins with the detective Philip Marlowe visiting General Sternwood, who wants to hire him. We learn about the case as Marlowe does. Throughout the rest of the film, he is present in every scene. With hardly any exceptions, we don't see or hear anything that he can't see and hear. The narration is *restricted* to what Marlowe knows.



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We examine the idea of restricting the narration to what one character knows in "Alignment, allegiance, and murder."

“In the first section [of *Reservoir Dogs*], up until Mr. Orange shoots Mr. Blonde, the characters have far more information about what’s going on than you have—and they have conflicting information. Then the Mr. Orange sequence happens and that’s a great leveler. You start getting caught up with exactly what’s going on, and in the third part, when you go back into the warehouse for the climax you are totally ahead of everybody—you know far more than any one of the characters.”

—Quentin Tarantino, director

Each alternative offers certain advantages. *The Birth of a Nation* seeks to present a panoramic vision of a period in American history (based on a racist ideology). Omniscient narration is thus essential to creating the sense of many destinies intertwined with the fate of the country. Had Griffith restricted narration the way *The Big Sleep* does, we would have learned story information solely through one character—say, Ben Cameron. We could not witness the prologue scene, or the scenes in Lincoln’s office, or most of the battle episodes, or the scene of Lincoln’s assassination, since Ben is present at none of these events. The plot would now concentrate on one man’s experience of the Civil War and Reconstruction.

Similarly, *The Big Sleep* benefits from its restricted narration. By limiting us to Marlowe’s range of knowledge, the film can create curiosity and surprise. Restricted narration is important to mystery films, since such films engage our interest by hiding important causes. Confining the plot to an investigator’s range of knowledge plausibly motivates concealing important story information. *The Big Sleep* could have been less restricted if the screenwriter had alternated scenes of Marlowe’s investigation with scenes that show the gambling boss, Eddie Mars, planning his crimes. But this would have given away some of the mystery. In both *The Birth of a Nation* and *The Big Sleep*, the narration’s range of knowledge functions to elicit particular reactions from the viewer.

Range of Knowledge: A Matter of Degree Unrestricted narration and restricted narration aren’t watertight categories but rather two ends of a continuum. A filmmaker may choose to present a broader range of knowledge than does *The Big Sleep* and still not attain the omniscience of *The Birth of a Nation*.

Early scenes of *North by Northwest*, for instance, confine us pretty much to what Roger Thornhill sees and knows. After he flees from the United Nations building, however, the plot takes us to Washington, where the members of the U.S. Intelligence Agency discuss the situation. Here the viewer learns something that Roger won’t learn for some time: the man he seeks, George Kaplan, doesn’t exist. From then on, we have a greater range of knowledge than Roger does. And we know a bit more than the Agency’s staff: we know exactly how the mix-up took place. But we still don’t know many other things that the narration could have divulged in the scene in Washington. For instance, the Agency’s staff members don’t identify the secret agent they have working under Van Damm’s nose.

This oscillation between restricted and unrestricted narration is common in films. Typically the plot shifts from character to character, giving us a little more than any one character knows while still withholding some crucial items from us. Even if the plot is focused on a single protagonist, the narration usually includes a few scenes that the character isn’t present to witness. *Tootsie*’s narration remains almost entirely attached to actor Michael Dorsey, but a few shots show his acquaintances shopping or watching him on television.

Lebanon, set during the June 1982 Israeli-Lebanese war, comes very close to purely restricted narration. Apart from the beginning and ending, the entire film is set inside a tank, where we are limited to what the four team members know. Usually films with such strong attachments to characters cheat a little by cutting to action taking place outside. Here there is no violation of the setting (3.18, 3.19). Necessary information from outside comes via radio communications. Director Samuel Maoz has said that his goal was to make audience members experience young soldiers’ sense of the horror of war and their oppressive confinement. “You see only what they see. You know only what they know.” Yet there are still moments when one soldier’s reactions aren’t noticed by the others, so we gain a slightly wider range of knowledge than any one character has.

Analyzing Range of Narration An easy way to analyze the range of narration is to ask, “Who knows what when?” This question applies to the characters and the spectator as well. At any given moment, we can ask if we the audience knows more than, less than, or as much as the characters do. Sometimes we may get information that no character possesses. We shall see this happen at the end of *Citizen Kane*.



3.18



3.19

3.18–3.19 Severely restricted range of knowledge. In *Lebanon*, we see the world outside a tank as the characters do, through a gunner’s crosshairs (3.18) or when the hatch is briefly opened (3.19).

Filmmakers can achieve powerful effects by manipulating the range of story information. Restricted narration tends to create greater curiosity and surprise for the viewer. For instance, if a character is exploring a sinister house, and we see and hear no more than the character does, a sudden revelation of a hand thrusting out from a doorway will startle us.

In contrast, as Hitchcock pointed out, a dose of unrestricted narration helps to build suspense. He explained it this way to François Truffaut:

We are now having a very innocent little chat. Let us suppose that there is a bomb underneath this table between us. Nothing happens, and then all of a sudden, “Boom!” There is an explosion. The public is surprised, but prior to this surprise, it has seen an absolutely ordinary scene, of no special consequence. Now, let us take a suspense situation. The bomb is underneath the table and the public knows it, probably because they have seen the anarchist place it there. The public is aware that the bomb is going to explode at one o’clock and there is a clock in the decor. The public can see that it is a quarter to one. In these conditions this innocuous conversation becomes fascinating because the public is participating in the scene. The audience is

“Narrative tension is primarily about withholding information.”

—Ian McEwan, novelist



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Cloverfield uses an unusually restricted narration, confining itself to a video recording shot by the main characters. See our analysis, “A behemoth from the Dead Zone.” As if corresponding to *Cloverfield*, the teenage superhero movie *Chronicle* found ingenious ways to expand the video recording as the plot develops. We discuss this problem of motivation in “Return to paranormalcy.”



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In a series of entries starting with "Hitchcock, Lessing, & the bomb under the table," we consider where Hitchcock may have gotten his ideas on suspense and surprise.

longing to warn the characters on the screen: "You shouldn't be talking about such trivial matters. There's a bomb beneath you and it's about to explode!"

In the first case we have given the public fifteen seconds of surprise at the moment of the explosion. In the second case we have provided them with fifteen minutes of suspense. The conclusion is that whenever possible the public must be informed.

Hitchcock put his theory into practice. In *Psycho*, Lila Crane explores the Bates mansion in much the same way as our hypothetical character was doing. There are isolated moments of surprise as she discovers odd information about Norman and his mother. But the overall effect of the sequence is built on suspense because we know, as Lila does not, that Mrs. Bates is in the house. (Actually, as in *North by Northwest*, our knowledge isn't completely accurate, but during Lila's investigation, we believe it to be.) As in Hitchcock's anecdote, our greater range of knowledge creates suspense because we can anticipate events that the character cannot. Once more, the filmmaker guides the viewer's expectations.

Depth of Story Information: Objective or Subjective?

A film's narration manipulates not only the range of knowledge but also the *depth* of our knowledge. The filmmaker must decide how far to plunge into a character's psychological states. As with restricted and unrestricted narration, there is a spectrum between objectivity and subjectivity.

A plot might confine us wholly to information about what characters say and do. Here the narration is relatively *objective*. Or a film's plot may give us access to what characters see and hear. The filmmaker might give us shots taken from a character's optical standpoint, the **point-of-view (POV) shot**. For instance, in *North by Northwest*, point-of-view editing is used as we see Roger Thornhill crawl up to Van Damm's window (3.20–3.22). Or we might hear sounds as the character would



3.20



3.21



3.22

3.20–3.22 Perceptual subjectivity in *North by Northwest*. Roger Thornhill looks in Van Damm's window (objective narration; 3.20), and an optical POV shot follows (perceptual subjectivity; 3.21). This is followed by another shot of Roger looking (objectivity again; 3.22).

hear them, what sound recordists call *sound perspective*. In short, through either sight or sound, the filmmaker gives us what we might call *perceptual subjectivity*.

The filmmaker can go deeper, beyond the character's senses and into her or his mind. We can call this *mental subjectivity*. We might hear an internal voice reporting the character's thoughts, or we might see the character's inner images, representing memory, fantasy, dreams, or hallucinations. In *Slumdog Millionaire*, the hero is a contestant on a quiz show, but his concentration is often interrupted by brief shots showing his memories, particularly one image of the woman he loves (3.23, 3.24). Here Jamal's memory motivates flashbacks to earlier story events.

Either sort of subjectivity may be signaled through particular film techniques. If a character is drunk, or drugged, the filmmakers may render those perceptual states through slow motion, blurred imagery, or distorted sound. Similar techniques may suggest a dream or hallucination.

But some imaginary actions may not be so strongly marked. Another scene in *Slumdog Millionaire* shows Jamal reuniting with his gangster brother Salim atop a skyscraper under construction. Jamal hurls himself at Salim, and we see shots of both falling from the building (3.25, 3.26). But the next shot presents Jamal still on the skyscraper, glaring at Salim (3.27). Now we realize that the images of the falling



3.23



3.24

3.23–3.24 Memories motivate flashbacks. Early in *Slumdog Millionaire*, it's established that during the quiz show (3.23) Jamal recalls his past—most often, his glimpse of Latika at the train station (3.24).



3.25



3.26



3.27

3.25–3.27 Suppressed cues for subjectivity in *Slumdog Millionaire*. Furious with Salim, Jamal grabs him and rushes toward the edge of the building (3.25). Several shots present their fall (3.26), but then the narration cuts back to Jamal, glaring at Salim (3.27). This shot reveals that he only imagined killing both of them.

men were purely mental, representing Jamal's rage. Because the shots weren't marked as subjective, we briefly thought that their fall was really taking place.

Typically, moments of perceptual and mental subjectivity come in bursts. They tend to be embedded in a framework of objective narration. POV shots, like those assigned to Roger Thornhill in *North by Northwest*, and flashbacks or fantasies are bracketed by more objective shots. We are able to understand Jamal's memory of Latika and his urge to kill Salim because those images are framed by shots of actions that are really happening in the plot. Other sorts of films, however, may avoid this convention. Fellini's *8½*, Luis Buñuel's *Belle de Jour*, Peter Haneke's *Caché*, and *Memento* mix objectivity and subjectivity in ambiguous ways. *Inception* doesn't signal its dreams with the usual special effects, so that often we're not sure whether we're in reality or a dream (or a dream nested inside another dream).

If a filmmaker restricts our knowledge to a single character, does that restriction create greater subjective depth? Not necessarily. *The Big Sleep* is quite restricted in its range of knowledge, as we've seen. But we very seldom see or hear things from Marlowe's perceptual vantage point, and we never get direct access to his mind. *The Big Sleep* uses almost completely objective narration. The omniscient narration of *The Birth of a Nation*, however, plunges to considerable psychological depth with optical POV shots, flashbacks, and the hero's final fantasy vision of a world without war. To maximize suspense, Hitchcock's films may give us slightly greater knowledge than his characters have. But at certain moments, he confines us to their perceptual subjectivity (usually relying on POV shots). For the filmmaker, range and depth of knowledge are independent variables. These examples show that for the filmmaker, choices about the range of knowledge can be made independently of choices about depth of knowledge.

Incidentally, this is one reason why the term "point of view" is ambiguous. It can refer to range of knowledge (as when a critic speaks of an "omniscient point of view") or to depth (as when speaking of "subjective point of view"). In the rest of this book, we'll use "point of view" only to refer to perceptual subjectivity, as in the phrase "optical point-of-view shot," or POV shot.

Why would a filmmaker manipulate depth of knowledge? Plunging into mental subjectivity can increase our sympathy for a character and can cue stable expectations about what the characters will later say or do. The memory sequences in Alain Resnais's *Hiroshima mon amour* and the fantasy sequences in Federico Fellini's *8½* yield information about the protagonists' traits and possible future actions that would be less vivid if presented objectively. A subjectively motivated flashback can create parallels among characters, as does the flashback shared by mother and son in Kenji Mizoguchi's *Sansho the Bailiff* (3.28–3.31). A plot can create curiosity about a character's motives and then use some degree of subjectivity—for example, inner commentary or subjective flashback—to explain what caused the behavior. In *The Sixth Sense*, the child psychologist's odd estrangement from his wife begins to make sense when we hear his inner recollection of something his young patient had told him much earlier.

On the other hand, objectivity can be an effective way of withholding information. One reason that *The Big Sleep* does not treat Marlowe subjectively is that the detective genre demands that the investigator's reasoning be concealed from the viewer. The mystery is more mysterious if we do not know the investigator's hunches and conclusions before he reveals them at the end.

A film need not be in the mystery genre to exploit objective and restricted narration. Julia Loktev's *Day Night Day Night* follows a young woman who has been recruited as a suicide bomber. We see her accepted into the group, awaiting orders, and eventually embarking on the mission. One scene utilizes optical point of view extensively, while another does so briefly. There are a few moments of auditory subjectivity, when the noises of street traffic drop out. Yet these flashes of subjective depth stand out against an overwhelmingly objective presentation. For nearly the entire film, we have to assess the woman's state of mind purely through her



3.28



3.29



3.30



3.31

3.28–3.31 Characters sharing memories. One of the early flashbacks in *Sansho the Bailiff* starts with the mother, now living in exile with her children, kneeling by a stream (3.28). Her image is replaced by a shot of her husband in the past, about to summon his son Zushio (3.29). At the climax of the scene in the past, the father gives Zushio an image of the goddess of mercy and admonishes him always to show kindness to others (3.30). Normal procedure would come out of the flashback showing the mother again, emphasizing it as her memory. Instead, we return to the present with a shot of Zushio, bearing the goddess's image (3.31). It is as if he and his mother have shared the memory of the father's gift.

physical behavior. Moreover, our information about the story action is very limited. We are never told what political group has recruited her or why she has volunteered for the task. The woman herself does not know the plan, the members of the terrorist group, or the reasons she was picked. In fact, we know less than she does, because we get only hints about her past life. The impersonal, tightly restricted narration of *Day Night Day Night* not only creates suspense about her mission but also encourages curiosity about a rather large number of story events. These responses make judging her decisions difficult, and they lead us to reflect on why someone would volunteer for a suicide mission.

At any moment in a film, we can ask, "How deeply do I know the characters' perceptions, feelings, and thoughts?" The answer will point directly to how the filmmaker has chosen to present or withhold story information. We can then ask about what effects the narration has on us, the viewers.

The Narrator

Narration, then, is the process by which the plot presents story information to the spectator. The filmmaker may shift between restricted and unrestricted ranges of knowledge and varying degrees of objectivity and subjectivity. The filmmaker may also use a *narrator*, some specific agent who purports to be telling us the story.

The narrator may be a character in the story. We are familiar with this convention from literature, as when Huck Finn or Jane Eyre recounts a novel's action. In *D.O.A.*, the dying man tells his story in flashbacks, addressing the information to inquiring policemen. In the documentary *Roger and Me*, Michael Moore frankly acknowledges his role as a character narrator. He starts the film with his reminiscences of growing up in Flint, Michigan, and he appears on camera in interviews with workers and in confrontations with General Motors security staff. Even an unseen character can serve as a narrator, as an unborn child does in Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust*.



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For more on the distinction between perceptual and mental subjectivity in narration see "Categorical coherence: A closer look at character subjectivity."

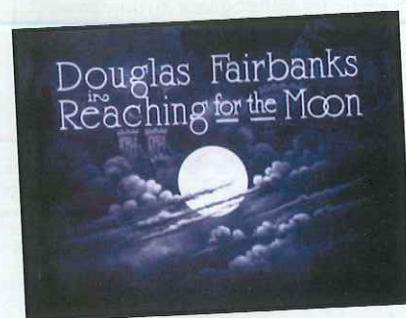


A CLOSER LOOK

When the Lights Go Down, the Narration Starts

When we open a novel, we don't expect the story action to start on the copyright page. Nor do we expect to find the story's last scene on the book's back cover. But filmmakers can start giving us narrative information during the credit sequences, and the process can continue to the very last moments we're in the theater.

Credit sequences are nondiegetic material, but they can assist our understanding of the story. Long ago filmmakers realized that credits could be enlivened by drawings and paintings keyed to the action (3.32). Since the 1920s, the credits' graphic design and musical accompaniment have often conjured up the story's time and place (3.33). The breezy credits of Truffaut's *Jules and Jim* offer glimpses of scenes to come while firmly establishing the two young men's friendship in 1910s Paris.



3.32 Incorporating illustration. An early example of illustrated credits for the 1917 comedy *Reaching for the Moon*.



3.33 Evoking locations. *Raw Deal*, a crime film from 1948, begins in prison, and the credit sequence suggests the locale before the action begins.



3.34 Hinting at actions and themes. Saul Bass's elegantly simple credits for *Advise and Consent* hint that the story will lift the lid off Washington scandals.



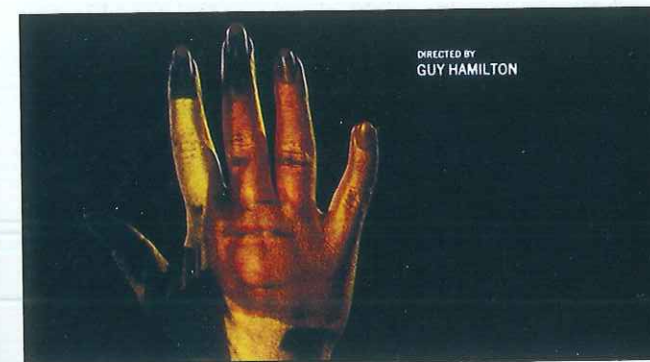
3.35 Setting expectations of tone. A collage design suggesting sophistication and glamorous lifestyles (*Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*).



3.36 Anticipating scenes. Some of the stick-figure credits in *Bringing Up Baby* anticipate scenes that will take place in the story action.

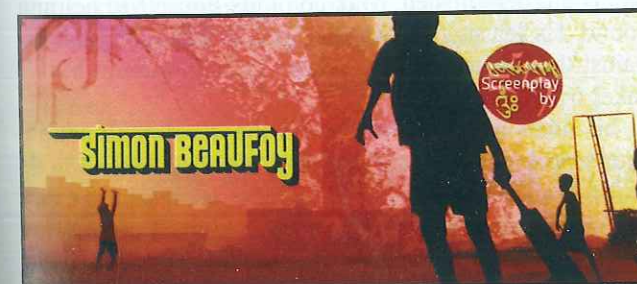
plot premises of *Catch Me If You Can* are previewed in the title sequence, which pays affectionate homage to the animated credits of the film's period (3.38). *Se7en*'s scratchy glimpses of cutting, stitching, and defacement launched a cycle of nightmarish credit sequences showing violation and dismemberment. Less overtly, the opening of *The Thomas Crown Affair* hints at the hero's scheme for stealing a painting.

Films often end their plot with an epilogue that celebrates the stable state that the characters have achieved, and



3.37 Introducing motifs. *Goldfinger*: The gilded woman will reappear in the film, while other scenes to come, including visions of the villain, are projected on areas of her body.

3.38 Evoking a time period and previewing a story. The streamlined animation of *Catch Me If You Can* evokes 1960s credit sequences while previewing story action and settings. Here the Tom Hanks character starts to trail Leonardo DiCaprio, who plays an impostor pretending to be an airline pilot.



3.39 Presenting an epilogue. In *Slumdog Millionaire*, the dance epilogue in the railway station is intercut with the major credits, which recall scenes from the film.

3.40 Credit cookies. Takeshi Kitano's *Sonatine* follows its final credit sequence with desolate images of a beach, wistfully reminding us of earlier scenes showing childish gangsters at play.



The narrator needn't be a character in the story. Noncharacter narrators are common in documentaries. We never learn who belongs to the anonymous "voice of God" we hear in *The River*, *Primary*, or *Hoop Dreams*. A fictional film may employ this device as well. *Amélie*'s cozy commentator adds a touch of fantasy, while the urgent voice-over we hear during *The Naked City* suggests that the film has a documentary authenticity.

Either sort of narrator may give us any range or depth of knowledge. A character narrator is not necessarily restricted and very often tells of events that she or he didn't witness. This happens in *The Quiet Man*, when the relatively minor figure of the village priest recounts the action. Likewise, a noncharacter narrator might not be omniscient and could confine the commentary to what a single character knows. A character narrator might be highly subjective, telling us details of his or her inner life, or might be objective, confining the information strictly to externals. A noncharacter narrator might give us access to subjective depths, as in *Jules and Jim*, or might stick simply to surface events, as does the impersonal voice-over commentator in *The Killing*. In any case, the viewer's process of picking up cues, developing expectations, and constructing an ongoing story out of the plot will be partially shaped by what the narrator tells or doesn't tell.

CREATIVE DECISIONS

Choices about Narration in Storytelling

The Road Warrior (also known as *Mad Max 2*) offers a neat summary of how narration contributes to a film's overall effect. At certain points in the film, director George Miller and writers Terry Hayes and Brian Hannant chose to supply information that builds expectations and help us grasp the story. At other points, they decided to withhold information for the sake of surprise.

The plot opens with a voice-over commentary by an elderly male narrator who recalls "the warrior Max." After presenting exposition that tells of the worldwide wars that led society to degenerate into gangs of scavengers, the narrator falls silent. Who is he? We aren't told yet.

The rest of the plot is organized around Max's encounter with a group of peaceful desert settlers. They want to flee to the coast with the gasoline they have refined, but they're under siege by a gang of vicious marauders. Max agrees to work for the settlers in exchange for gasoline. Later, after a brush with the gang leaves him wounded, his dog dead, and his car demolished, Max commits himself to helping the settlers flee their compound. He learns that only by joining them can he hope to survive. The struggle against the encircling gang comes to its climax in Max's attempt to escape with a tanker truck.

Max is the protagonist; his goals and conflicts propel the developing action. After the anonymous narrator's prologue, most of the film is restricted to Max's range of knowledge. Like Philip Marlowe in *The Big Sleep*, Max is present in every scene, and almost everything we learn gets funneled through him. The narration also gives us a degree of subjectivity, again focused on Max. We get optical POV shots as Max drives his car (3.41) or watches a skirmish through a telescope. When he is rescued after his car crash, his delirium is rendered as perceptual subjectivity, using the conventional cues of slow motion, superimposed imagery, and slowed-down sound (3.42). All of these narrational choices encourage us to sympathize with Max.

At certain points, however, the narration becomes more unrestricted. This occurs principally during chases and battle scenes, when we witness events Max doesn't know about. In such scenes, unrestricted narration builds up suspense by showing both pursuers and pursued or different aspects of the battle. At the climax,

“The whole art of movies and plays is in the control of the flow of information to the audience . . . : how much information, when, how fast it comes. Certain things maybe have to be there three times.”

—Tom Stoppard, playwright and screenwriter of *Shakespeare in Love*



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Stretches of unrestricted narration allow a filmmaker to show characters' reactions to a situation. We trace some examples in *Road Warrior* and other films in "They're looking for us."



3.41



3.42

3.41–3.42 Narration in *The Road Warrior*: Optical point of view and perceptual subjectivity. The narration provides a POV shot as Max drives up to an apparently abandoned gyrocopter (3.41). The injured Max's dizzy view of his rescuer uses double exposure to present his delirium as perceptual subjectivity (3.42).

Max's truck successfully draws the gang away from the desert people, who escape to the south. But when his truck overturns, Max—and we—learn that the truck holds only sand. It has been a decoy. Thus our restriction to Max's range of knowledge creates a surprise.

There is still more to learn, however. At the very end, the elderly narrator's voice returns to tell us that he was the feral child whom Max had befriended. The settlers drive off, and Max is left alone in the middle of the highway. The film's final image—a shot of the solitary Max receding into the distance as we pull back (3.43)—suggests both a perceptual subjectivity (the boy's point of view as he rides away) and a mental subjectivity (the memory of Max dimming for the dying narrator).

The narrative form of *The Road Warrior*, then, rests on decisions about both plot and narration. The plot organizes causality, time, and space through an extended flashback, and it gains further coherence through consistent choices about narration. The main portion of the film channels our expectations through an attachment to Max, alternating with briefer, more unrestricted portions. This main section is in turn framed by the mysterious narrator who puts all the events into the distant past. The narrator's presence at the opening leads us to expect him to return at the end, perhaps explaining who he is. The filmmakers' creative choices have organized narration in order to give us a unified experience.



3.43 Mental and perceptual subjectivity. As the camera tracks away from Max, we hear the narrator's voice: "And the Road Warrior? That was the last we ever saw of him. He lives now only in my memories."

The Classical Hollywood Cinema

Perhaps you've decided to try your hand at writing a screenplay and you've investigated books and websites that offer advice. *Make sure your main character wants something. Emphasize conflict. Take your character on an emotional journey. Be sure that your ending resolves the initial situation.* Suggestions like these can be valuable, but we need to recognize that they reflect only one tradition. This tradition has often been called that of "classical Hollywood" filmmaking.

The tradition is called "classical" because it has been influential since about 1920 and "Hollywood" because the tradition assumed its most elaborate shape in American studio films. The same mode, however, governs narrative films made in other countries. For example, *The Road Warrior*, although an Australian film, is constructed along classical Hollywood lines. And many documentaries, such as



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David Koepp, screenwriter of *Jurassic Park* and *War of the Worlds*, discusses the cult of storytelling in "David Koepp: Making the world movie-sized." *Premium Rush*, written and directed by Koepp, is a model of a modern film in the classical Hollywood tradition. We discuss it in "Clocking doing 50 in the Dead Zone."



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How much variation can classical Hollywood storytelling permit, especially in regard to the plot's ordering of story events? We try for answers in "Innovation by accident" and "What-if movies: Forking paths in the drawing room."

famous as Steve Jobs became. Spectators would thus be looking for events keyed to Hearst's life.

Several minutes into the film, the viewer can form more specific expectations about the relevant genre conventions. The early "News on the March" sequence suggests that this film may be a fictional biography, and this hint is confirmed once the reporter, Thompson, begins his inquiry into Kane's life. In this genre, the plot typically traces an individual's life and dramatizes certain episodes. The most prominent fictional biographies released before *Kane* would include *Anthony Adverse* (1936) and *The Power and the Glory* (1933), about a somewhat Kane-like tycoon.

The viewer can also spot the conventions of the newspaper reporter genre. Thompson's colleagues resemble the wisecracking reporters in *Five Star Final* (1931), *Picture Snatcher* (1933), and *His Girl Friday* (1940). In this genre, the action usually depends on a reporter's dogged pursuit of a story against great odds. We therefore expect not only Thompson's investigation but also his triumphant exposure of the truth.

In the scenes devoted to Susan, there are also some conventions typical of the musical film: frantic rehearsals, backstage preparations, and, most specifically, the montage of her opera career, which parodies the conventional montage of singing success in such films as *Maytime* (1937; p. 253). More broadly, the film evidently owes something to the detective genre, since Thompson is aiming to solve a mystery (Who or what is Rosebud?), and his interviews resemble those of a detective questioning suspects.

Note, however, that *Kane's* use of genre conventions is somewhat equivocal. Unlike many biographical films, *Kane* is more concerned with psychological states and relationships than with the hero's public deeds or adventures. As a newspaper film, *Kane* is unusual in that the reporter fails to get his story. And *Kane* is not exactly a standard mystery, because it answers some questions but leaves others unanswered. *Citizen Kane* is a good example of a film that relies on genre conventions but often thwarts the expectations they arouse.

The same sort of equivocal qualities can be found in *Kane's* relation to the classical Hollywood storytelling tradition. Even without specific prior knowledge about this film, we expect that, as an American studio product of 1941, it will follow that tradition. In most ways, it does. We'll see that characters' desires propel the narrative, causality is defined around traits and goals, conflicts lead to consequences, time is motivated by plot necessity, and narration is mostly objective and mixes restricted and unrestricted passages. We'll also see some ways in which *Citizen Kane* is more ambiguous than most films in the classical tradition. Desires, traits, and goals are not always spelled out; the conflicts sometimes have an uncertain outcome; at the end, the narration's omniscience is emphasized to a rare degree. The ending in particular doesn't provide the degree of closure we would expect in a classical film. *Citizen Kane* draws on Hollywood narrative conventions but also violates some of the expectations that we bring to a Hollywood film.

Plot and Story in *Citizen Kane*

After Welles and Mankiewicz decided to tell the life story of a fictional newspaper magnate, Charles Foster Kane, they faced a choice that's familiar to you by now. They could have presented Kane's life story chronologically, letting their plot present incidents in story order as most fictional biographies do. They chose another option. They decided to trace Kane's life through flashbacks, recalled by people who knew him. But Welles and Mankiewicz needed something to motivate the characters' flashbacks. They hit upon the idea of having a media reporter seek the meaning of Kane's dying word, "Rosebud." This generates a second line of action, the reporter Thompson's investigation of Kane's life. The result is a film that creates an unusual relation of plot to story.

We can start to understand this by outlining a segmentation like the one we made for *The Wizard of Oz*. The basic segments are typically scenes, and they

form part of a larger section of the film. In the following outline, numerals refer to major parts, some of which are only one scene long. In most cases, however, the major parts consist of several scenes, and each of these is identified by a lowercase letter.

Citizen Kane: Plot Segmentation

C. Credit title.

1. Xanadu: Kane dies.

2. Projection room:

a. "News on the March."

b. Reporters discuss "Rosebud."

3. El Rancho nightclub: Thompson tries to interview Susan.

4. Thatcher library:

- a. Thompson enters and reads Thatcher's manuscript.
- b. Kane's mother sends the boy off with Thatcher.
- c. Kane grows up and buys the *Inquirer*.
- d. Kane launches the *Inquirer's* attack on big business.
- e. The Depression: Kane sells Thatcher his newspaper chain.
- f. Thompson leaves the library.

First
flashback

5. Bernstein's office:

- a. Thompson visits Bernstein.
- b. Kane takes over the *Inquirer*.
- c. Montage: the *Inquirer's* growth.
- d. Party: the *Inquirer* celebrates getting the *Chronicle* staff.
- e. Leland and Bernstein discuss Kane's trip abroad.
- f. Kane returns with his fiancée Emily.
- g. Bernstein concludes his reminiscence.

Second
flashback

6. Nursing home:

- a. Thompson talks with Leland.
- b. Breakfast table montage: Kane's marriage deteriorates.
- c. Leland continues his recollections.
- d. Kane meets Susan and goes to her room.
- e. Kane's political campaign culminates in his speech.
- f. Kane confronts Gettys, Emily, and Susan.
- g. Kane loses the election, and Leland asks to be transferred.
- h. Kane marries Susan.
- i. Susan has her opera premiere.
- j. Because Leland is drunk, Kane finishes Leland's review.
- k. Leland concludes his reminiscence.

Third
flashback

Fourth
flashback

Fourth
flashback
(cont.)

7. El Rancho nightclub:

- a. Thompson talks with Susan.
- b. Susan rehearses her singing.
- c. Susan has her opera premiere.
- d. Kane insists that Susan go on singing.
- e. Montage: Susan's opera career.
- f. Susan attempts suicide, and Kane promises she can quit singing.
- g. Xanadu: Susan is bored.
- h. Montage: Susan plays with jigsaw puzzles.
- i. Xanadu: Kane proposes a picnic.
- j. Picnic: Kane slaps Susan.
- k. Xanadu: Susan leaves Kane.
- l. Susan concludes her reminiscence.

Fifth
flashback

8. Xanadu:

Sixth
flashback

- a. Thompson talks with Raymond.
- b. Kane destroys Susan's room and picks up a paperweight, murmuring "Rosebud."
- c. Raymond concludes his reminiscence; Thompson talks with the other reporters; all leave.
- d. Survey of Kane's possessions leads to a revelation of Rosebud; exterior of gate and of castle; the end.

E. End credits.

This sort of outline lets us recover the film's overall architecture. Our segmentation lets us see at a glance the major divisions of the plot and how scenes are organized within them. It also helps us notice how the plot organizes story causality and story time.

Citizen Kane's Causality

Citizen Kane's plot has two main lines of action, but the chain of causality in each one is somewhat unusual. Welles and Mankiewicz give us an investigation—one not conducted by detectives but by reporters. A media company has made a newsreel about tycoon Charles Foster Kane, and that newsreel is already completed when the plot introduces the reporters. But the newsreel fails to satisfy the boss, Rowlston, and his desire to revise the newsreel gets the search for Rosebud underway. He assigns the reporter Thompson a goal, which sets him digging into Kane's past.

Another line of action, Kane's life, has already taken place when the plot begins. Many years before, a poverty-stricken boarder at Kane's mother's boarding-house has paid her with a deed to a gold mine. Thanks to these newfound riches, Mrs. Kane appoints Thatcher as young Charles's guardian. Thatcher's guardianship results in Kane's growing up into a spoiled, rebellious young man.

Usually an investigator searches for an object or a concealed set of facts. In this respect, Thompson's mission is straightforward: Who or what was Rosebud? But Thompson is also looking for a set of character traits. Rowlston's order is clear: "It isn't enough to tell us what a man did, you've got to tell us who he was." So finding the meaning of Rosebud promises to reveal something about Kane's personality. Kane, a rather complex character, has many traits that influence other characters' actions. But, as we'll see, *Citizen Kane's* narrative leaves some of Kane's character traits uncertain.

Thompson has a goal, then. So does Kane, although his is less well-defined. At various times of his life he seems to be searching for fame, friendship, social justice, or a woman's love. But part of the point of the film is that his real goals are uncertain. At several points, characters speculate that Rosebud was something that Kane lost or was never able to get. Such vagueness about a major character's goal makes this an unusual narrative for the Hollywood tradition.

Thompson and Kane are the prime movers of the action in their plot lines. In Kane's life, other characters come into conflict with him, and he changes their lives. In Thompson's plot line, however, these characters serve to provide information about Kane. Thatcher knew him as a child. Bernstein, his manager, knew his business dealings. His best friend, Leland, had access to his personal life, his first marriage in particular. Susan Alexander, his second wife, knew him in middle age. The butler, Raymond, managed Kane's affairs during his last years. Without these witnesses, Thompson couldn't pursue Rosebud. These secondary characters help us, too, as we reconstruct the progression of story events.

The use of testimony spanning Kane's life solves a major storytelling problem Welles and Mankiewicz faced. But as we've seen, one creative choice often demands others. The film's story includes Kane's wife Emily and his son, so shouldn't they be given a chance to share their impressions of the great man? The problem is that

their recollections would largely duplicate what we learn from Leland. Welles and Mankiewicz solve this problem in a simple way. They kill Emily and her son off in an auto accident, which occurs well before Thompson's investigation starts.

Time in *Citizen Kane*

Citizen Kane reshapes time in complex ways, and this gives the film much of its originality, particularly in the Hollywood of 1941.

Duration and Frequency The most conventional aspect of narrative time in the film involves duration. We know that Kane is 75 years old at his death in 1941, and the earliest scene shows him at around age 10. Thus the plot covers roughly 65 years of his life, plus the week of Thompson's investigation. The only earlier story event is Mrs. Kane's acquisition of the mine deed in 1868, which probably took place shortly before she turned her son over to Thatcher. So the story runs a bit longer than the plot—roughly 73 years. This time span is presented in a screen duration of almost 120 minutes.

Like most films, *Citizen Kane* uses ellipses. The plot skips over years of story time, as well as many hours of Thompson's week of investigations. But plot duration also compresses time through *montage sequences*, such as those showing the *Inquirer's* campaign against big business (4d), the growth of the paper's circulation (5c), Susan's opera career (7e), and Susan's bored playing with jigsaw puzzles (7h). Montage sequences became conventions of classical Hollywood cinema in the 1920s, and here they have their traditional function of condensing story duration in a comprehensible way. We'll discuss montage sequences in more detail in Chapter 6 (see pp. 252–253).

Kane is a little more unusual in its treatment of temporal frequency. One specific story event appears twice in the plot. In their flashbacks, both Leland and Susan describe her debut in the Chicago premiere of *Salammbô*. Watching Leland's account (6i), we see the performance from the front; we witness the audience reacting with distaste. Susan's version (7c) shows us the performance from behind and on the stage, emphasizing her humiliation. The plot's repeated presentation of Susan's debut doesn't confuse us, for we understand the two scenes as depicting the same story event. ("News on the March" has also referred to Susan's opera career, in parts G and H.) By repeating scenes of her embarrassment, the plot makes vivid the pain that Kane forces her to undergo.

Chronology and Flashbacks *Kane* presents an unusual ordering of story events. The central structural decision, that of using Thompson's investigation to motivate a series of flashbacks, asks us to put things in chronological order. For example, the earliest *story* event is Mrs. Kane's acquisition of a deed to a valuable mine. We get this information during the newsreel, in the second sequence. But the first event we encounter in the *plot* is Kane's death.

To illustrate the maneuvers that Welles and Mankiewicz ask us to execute, in building up the film's story, let's assume that Kane's life consists of these phases:

- Boyhood
- Youthful newspaper editing
- Life as a newlywed
- Middle age
- Old age

At first the plot doesn't present these story phases in chronological order. The early portions of the film boldly jump back and forth over many phases of Kane's life. The "News on the March" sequence (2a) gives us glimpses of all periods, and



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Flashbacks were part of film-making tradition before *Citizen Kane*. For analysis of flashbacks in Hollywood films during the 1930s, and especially *The Power and the Glory*, which influenced Orson Welles, see "Grandmaster flashback."

Thatcher's manuscript (4) shows us Kane in boyhood, youth, and middle age. In the first flashback, Thatcher's diary tells of a scene in which Kane loses control of his newspapers during the Depression (4e). By this time, Kane is a middle-aged man. Yet in the second flashback, Bernstein describes young Kane's arrival at the *Inquirer* office and his engagement to Emily (5b, 5f). The plot demands that we sort these events into chronological story order.

The film becomes less demanding as it goes along, however. Later portions of the plot tend to concentrate on particular periods, and the flashbacks respect chronological order. Bernstein's recollections (5) concentrate on episodes showing Kane as newspaper editor and fiancé of Emily. Leland's flashbacks (6) run from newlywed life to middle age. Susan (7) tells of Kane as a middle-aged and an old man. Raymond's brief but significant anecdote (8b) concentrates on Kane in old age.

By getting more linear, the plot helps us grasp the story. If every character's flashback skipped around Kane's life as much as the newsreel and Thatcher's account do, the story would be much harder to reconstruct. As it is, the early portions of the plot show us the results of events we have not seen, while the later portions confirm or modify the expectations that we formed in the more nonlinear scenes. For instance, we know that Kane will lose his newspapers to Thatcher, and that knowledge lends a certain poignancy to Kane's "Declaration of Principles" in which he pledges to fight for the common man.

By arranging story events out of order, the plot cues us to form specific anticipations. In the beginning, with Kane's death and the newsreel version of his life, the plot creates strong curiosity about two issues. What does "Rosebud" mean? And what could have happened to make so powerful a man die alone and, apparently, unmourned?

There is also a degree of suspense. When the plot goes back to the past, we already have quite firm knowledge. We know that neither of Kane's marriages will last and that his friends will drift away. The plot encourages us to focus our interest on *how* and *when* a particular thing will happen. What will break Leland's friendship with Kane? What will trigger Susan's decision to walk out on him? As Hitchcock pointed out (p. 89), giving us more knowledge than the characters have can promote suspense.

"News on the March" as a Map of the Plot In 1941, one of the most original sequences of the film was the "News on the March" newsreel. By looking over our segmentation, we can see that the newsreel is not only daring but very helpful. The very first sequence in Xanadu disorients us, for it shows the death of a character about whom we so far know almost nothing. But the newsreel quickly supplies a great deal of information about this mysterious figure. Moreover, by reviewing Kane's life, the newsreel makes it much easier to rearrange the plot events we'll see into linear story order. Here is an outline of "News on the March."

- A. Shots of Xanadu.
- B. Funeral; headlines announcing Kane's death.
- C. Growth of financial empire.
- D. Gold mine and Mrs. Kane's boardinghouse.
- E. Thatcher testimony at congressional committee.
- F. Political career.
- G. Private life; weddings, divorces.
- H. Opera house and Xanadu.
- I. Political campaign.
- J. The Depression.

K. 1935: Kane's old age.

L. Isolation of Xanadu.

M. Death announced.

Now we can see that the newsreel offers us a capsule preview of the film's overall plot. "News on the March" begins by emphasizing Kane as "Xanadu's Landlord"; a short segment (A) presents shots of the house and the compound. This is a variation on the opening of the whole film (1), which consisted of a series of shots of the grounds, moving progressively closer to the house. That opening sequence had ended with Kane's death; now the newsreel follows the shots of the house with Kane's funeral (B). Next comes a series of newspaper headlines announcing Kane's death. If we compare this portion with the segmentation of the entire film's plot, we see that these headlines occupy the approximate formal position of the whole newsreel itself (2a). Even the title card that follows the headlines ("To forty-four million U.S. news buyers, more newsworthy than the names in his own headlines was Kane himself. . .") is a brief parallel to the scene in the projection room, in which the reporters decide that Thompson should continue to investigate Kane's "newsworthy" life.

The order of the newsreel's presentation of Kane's life roughly parallels the order of scenes in the flashbacks told to Thompson. "News on the March" moves from Kane's death to a summary of the building of Kane's newspaper empire (C), with a description of the boarding-house deed and the mine (including an old photograph of Charles with his mother, as well as the first mention of the boy's sled). This bit parallels the first flashback (4), which tells how Thatcher took over the young Kane's guardianship from his mother and how Kane first attempted to run the *Inquirer*. The rough parallels continue: The newsreel tells of Kane's political ambitions (F), his marriages (G), his building of the opera house (H), his political campaign (I), and so on. In the main plot, Thatcher's flashback describes his own clashes with Kane on political matters. Leland's flashbacks (6) cover the first marriage, the affair with Susan, the political campaign, and the premiere of the opera *Salammbô*.

We haven't charted all of the similarities between the newsreel and the overall film. You can tease out many more by comparing the two closely. The crucial point is that the newsreel provides us with a map for the investigation of Kane's life. As we watch scenes in the flashbacks, we already expect certain events and have a rough chronological basis for fitting them into our story reconstruction.

Motivation in *Citizen Kane*

Citizen Kane follows classical Hollywood tradition in motivating the causes and effects that push the story forward. Even small details are justified causally. Why did Welles and Mankiewicz decide to make Thatcher a prosperous businessman? Their script could have had Mrs. Kane turn her son over to a kindly but poor family, one that wouldn't treat him as cruelly as apparently his father has. But Thatcher's social position motivates important events. By giving her son to Thatcher, Charles' mother catapults him into a wealthy circle, where he will wield the power we witness across the film. Thatcher's elite standing also makes it easy for Thompson to pursue his initial research on Kane's life. Thatcher is influential enough to testify at a congressional hearing, so he can appear in the newsreel (the first time we encounter him). As a self-important tycoon, he has chronicled his life in a journal, which Thompson can scan for information about Kane's childhood.

A striking instance of motivation involves Thompson's visit to Susan, Kane's second wife at the El Rancho nightclub (3). It's plausible that Thompson would start his search with Kane's ex-wife, presumably the surviving person closest to him. But let's think like a screenwriter. In the story, the young Kane is an audacious editor, thumbing his nose at the stuffed-shirt Thatcher and taking up the cause of



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Citizen Kane helped popularize flashback-based narratives in the 1940s. We look at some less familiar but equally interesting examples in "Chinese boxes, Russian dolls, and Hollywood movies." For more on flashbacks in movies old and new, see "Puppetry and ventriloquism."

the poor. But Susan didn't know Kane then. If she had been given the first flashback, it would have dwelt on Kane's old age, a period in which he was pompous and self-centered. If Susan had told her story first, showing the elderly Kane, we would not sense his character change gradually. By delaying her flashback, the plot lets Thatcher, Bernstein, and Leland fill in Kane's early, rambunctious years. By then we're prepared to appreciate, from Susan's testimony, how he has decayed into a selfish, aggressive old man.

So the creative problem was, find a way to prevent Susan from telling her story. The solution that Mankiewicz and Welles chose was to make Susan drunk and angry during Thompson's visit. Her refusal to speak to him motivates postponing her flashback. It also enhances the mystery around Kane—why won't she go on the record?—while her alcoholic haze suggests that he has damaged the people closest to him.

Some critics have argued that the search for Rosebud is a flaw in *Citizen Kane*, because the revelation of the boy's sled is an oversimplification. Does all this come down to the fact that Kane just longs for his lost childhood and his mother's love? If we assume that the point of the plot is simply to identify Rosebud, this charge might be valid. But in fact, Rosebud serves a very important motivating function. It creates Thompson's goal and thus focuses our attention on his digging into the lives of Kane and his associates. *Citizen Kane* becomes a mystery story; but instead of investigating a crime, the reporter investigates a character.

Furthermore, it's not clear that the plot lets us conclude that Rosebud is the final answer to the quest. In the final scene, Thompson gives up the search. He doubts that "any word can explain a man's life." Moreover, in the scene in the newsreel projection room, Rawlston suggests that "maybe he told us all about himself on his deathbed." Immediately, one of the reporters says, "Yeah, and maybe he didn't." Already the suggestion is planted that Rosebud may not provide any adequate answers about Kane. Later Leland scornfully dismisses the Rosebud issue and goes on to talk of other things. Characters' skepticism about the Rosebud clue helps justify Thompson's pessimistic attitude in the final sequence.

Linked to the uncertainties around Rosebud is a degree of ambiguity about psychological motivations. These relate primarily to Kane's character. The characters' varying portraits of Kane don't neatly tally. Bernstein still looks on Kane with sympathy and affection, whereas Leland is cynical about his own relationship with Kane. Likewise, the reasons for some of Kane's actions remain unclear. Does he send Leland the \$25,000 check in firing him because of a lingering sentiment over their old friendship or from a proud desire to prove himself more generous than Leland? Why does he insist on stuffing Xanadu with hundreds of artworks that he never even unpacks? By leaving these questions open, the film invites us to speculate on various facets of Kane's personality. The ambiguities around Rosebud and Kane's character are unusual for the classical Hollywood tradition, which usually prefers more clear-cut explanations of character psychology.

Citizen Kane's Parallelism

Parallelism doesn't provide a major principle of development in *Citizen Kane's* narrative form, but it crops up more locally. We've already seen important formal parallels between the newsreel and the film's plot as a whole. There is as well a parallel between the two major lines of action: Kane's life and Thompson's search. Both men are searching for Rosebud. Rosebud serves as a summary of the things Kane strives for through his adult life. We see him repeatedly fail to find love and friendship, living alone at Xanadu in the end. His inability to find happiness parallels Thompson's failure to locate the significance of the word "Rosebud."

Another narrative parallel juxtaposes Kane's campaign for the governorship with his attempt to build up Susan's career as an opera star. In each case, he seeks to inflate his reputation by influencing public opinion. In trying to achieve success for Susan, Kane forces his newspaper employees to write favorable reviews of her

performances. This parallels the moment when he loses the election and the *Inquirer* automatically proclaims a fraud at the polls. In both cases, Kane fails to realize that his power over the public is not great enough to hide the flaws in his projects: first his affair with Susan, which ruins his campaign; then her lack of singing ability, which Kane refuses to admit. The parallels show that Kane continues to make the same kinds of mistakes throughout his life.

Patterns of Plot Development in Citizen Kane

The order of Thompson's visits to Kane's acquaintances allows the series of flashbacks to have a clear progression. Thanks to the delay in presenting Susan's flashback, Thompson moves from people who knew Kane early in his life to those who knew him as an old man. Moreover, each flashback contains a distinct type of information about Kane. Bernstein gives an account of the newspaper's growth, and then Leland traces Kane's changing political views. Both men provide the background to Kane's early success and lead into stories of Kane's personal life. Here we get the first real indications of Kane's failure. Susan continues to trace his decline by explaining how he ruled her life. Finally, in Raymond's flashback, Kane becomes a pitiable old man. Thompson's present-day inquiry has its own pattern of development, that of a search. By the ending, this search has failed, as Kane's own search for happiness or personal success had failed.

Because of Thompson's failure, the ending of *Citizen Kane* remains somewhat more open than was the rule in Hollywood in 1941. True, Thompson does resolve the question of Rosebud for himself by saying that it would not have explained Kane's life. To this extent, we have the common pattern showing the protagonist gaining greater knowledge. Still, in most classical narrative films, the main character reaches his or her initial goal, and Thompson, the main character of this line of action, fails to achieve his aim.

The line of action involving Kane himself has even less closure. Not only does Kane apparently not reach his goal, but the film never specifies what that goal is to start with. Most classical narratives create a situation of conflict. The character must struggle with a problem and solve it by the ending. Kane begins his adult life in a highly successful position, happily running the *Inquirer*, and then gradually falls into a barren solitude. His chief conflicts are with his wives and friends; his clash with a political boss rates only one scene. We are invited to speculate about exactly what, if anything, would have made Kane happy. *Citizen Kane's* lack of closure in this biographical line of action made it a very unusual narrative for its day.

Still, the search for Rosebud does lead to a certain resolution. We the audience discover what Rosebud was. The ending of the film, which follows this discovery, strongly echoes the beginning. The beginning moved past fences toward the mansion. Now a series of shots takes us away from the house and back outside the fences, with the "No Trespassing" sign and large K insignia.

But even at this point, when we learn the answer to Thompson's question, a degree of uncertainty remains. Just because we have learned what Kane's dying word referred to, do we now have the key to his entire character? Or is Thompson's final statement correct—that no one word can explain a person's life? Perhaps the final shot of the "No Trespassing" sign hints that neither Thompson nor we should have expected to know Kane's mind fully. It is tempting to declare that all of Kane's problems arose from the loss of his sled and his childhood home life, but the film also suggests that this is too easy a solution. It is the kind of solution that the slick editor Rawlston would pounce on as an angle for his newsreel.

For years critics have debated whether the Rosebud solution does give us a key that resolves the entire narrative. This debate itself suggests the ambiguity at work in *Citizen Kane*. The film provides much evidence for both views and hence avoids complete closure. We can contrast this somewhat open ending with those of

“Kane, we are told, loved only his mother—only his newspaper—only his second wife—only himself. Maybe he loved all of these, or none. It is for the audience to judge. Kane was selfish and selfless, an idealist, a scoundrel, a very big man and a very little one. It depends on who's talking about him. He is never judged with the objectivity of an author, and the point of the picture is not so much the solution of the problem as its presentation.”

—Orson Welles, director

His Girl Friday and *North by Northwest*, as well as with another open-ended film, *Do The Right Thing*. All are discussed in Chapter 11.

Narration in *Citizen Kane*

In analyzing how *Kane*'s plot manipulates the moment-by-moment flow of story information, it's useful to consider a remarkable fact. The only time we see Kane directly and in the present is when he dies. On all other occasions, he is presented at one remove—in the newsreel or in various characters' memories. This unusual treatment makes the film something of a portrait, a study of a man seen from different perspectives.

The film employs five character narrators, the people whom Thompson tracks down: Thatcher (whose account is in writing), Bernstein, Leland, Susan, and the butler, Raymond. The plot motivates a series of views of Kane that are more or less restricted in their range of knowledge. In Thatcher's account (4b–4e), we see only scenes at which he is present. Even Kane's newspaper crusade is rendered as Thatcher learns of it, through buying copies of the *Inquirer*. In Bernstein's flashback (5b–5f), there is some deviation from what Bernstein witnesses, but in general his range of knowledge is respected. For example, we never see Kane in Europe; we merely hear the contents of Kane's telegram, which Bernstein delivers to Leland.

Leland's flashbacks (6b, 6d–6j) deviate most markedly from the narrator's allotted range of knowledge. Here we see Kane and Emily at a series of morning breakfasts, Kane's meeting with Susan, and the confrontation of Kane with Boss Gettys at Susan's apartment. In scene 6j, Leland is present but in a drunken stupor most of the time. (The plot motivates Leland's knowledge of Kane's affair by having Leland suggest that Kane told him about it, but the scenes present detailed knowledge that Leland probably didn't possess.) By the time we get to Susan's flashback (7b–7k), however, the range of knowledge again fits the character more snugly. (In one scene, 7f, Susan is unconscious for part of the action.) The last flashback (8b) is recounted by Raymond and plausibly accords with his range of knowledge; he is standing in the hallway as Kane wrecks Susan's room.

Using different narrators to transmit story information fulfills several functions. It offers a plausible depiction of the process of investigation, since we expect any reporter to assemble information through interviews. More deeply, the plot's portrayal of Kane himself becomes more complex by showing somewhat different sides of him, depending on who's talking about him. Moreover, the multiple narrators make the film resemble one of Susan's jigsaw puzzles. We must put things together piece by piece. The pattern of gradual revelation enhances curiosity—what is it in Kane's past that he associates with Rosebud?—and suspense—how will he lose his friends and his wives?

This strategy has important implications for film form. While Thompson uses the various witnesses to gather data, the plot uses the narrators both to furnish story information and to *conceal* information. The narration can motivate gaps in knowledge about Kane by appealing to the fact that nobody can know everything about anyone else. If we were able to enter Kane's consciousness, we might discover the meaning of Rosebud much sooner. But Kane is dead. The multiple-narrator format motivates the withholding of key pieces of information, and this in turn arouses curiosity and suspense.

Although each narrator's account is mostly restricted to his or her range of knowledge, the plot doesn't treat each flashback in much subjective depth. Most of the flashbacks are rendered objectively. Some transitions from the framing episodes use a voice-over commentary to lead us into the flashbacks, but these don't represent the narrators' subjective states. Only in Susan's flashbacks are there some attempts to render subjectivity. In scene 7c, we see Leland as if from her optical point

of view on stage, and the phantasmagoric montage of her career (7e) reveals her fatigue and frustration. These scenes help make her the most sympathetic narrator, reinforcing our sense that Kane has cruelly forced her to pursue a singing career.

Against the five character narrators, the film's plot sets another source of knowledge, the "News on the March" short. We've already seen the crucial function of the newsreel in introducing us to *Kane*'s plot construction, with the newsreel's sections previewing the parts of the film as a whole. The newsreel also gives us a broad sketch of Kane's life and death that will be filled in by the more restricted behind-the-scenes accounts offered by the narrators. The newsreel is also highly objective, even more so than the rest of the film; it reveals nothing about Kane's inner life. Rawlston's assigns Thompson to add depth to the newsreel's superficial version of Kane.

Yet we still aren't through with the narrational manipulations in this complex and daring film. For one thing, all the localized sources of knowledge—"News on the March" and the five narrators—are linked together by the shadowy reporter Thompson. To some extent, he is our surrogate in the film, gathering and assembling the puzzle pieces.

It's very striking, especially for a film made over 70 years ago, that Thompson is barely characterized. We can't even identify his face (3.44). This, as usual, has a function. If we saw him clearly, if the plot gave him more traits or a background or a past, he would become the central protagonist, as reporters tend to be in the journalism genre. But *Citizen Kane* is less about Thompson the man than about his *search*. The plot's handling of Thompson makes him a neutral channel for the story information that he gathers, even though his conclusion at the end—"I don't think any word can explain a man's life"—suggests that he has been changed by his investigation.

Thompson is not, however, a perfect surrogate for us. That's because the film's narration inserts the newsreel, the narrators, and Thompson within a still broader range of knowledge. The flashback portions are predominantly restricted, but there are other passages that reveal an overall narrational omniscience.

From the very start, we are given a god's-eye view of the action. We move into a mysterious setting that we later learn is Kane's estate, Xanadu. We might have learned about this locale through a character's journey, the way we acquaint ourselves with Oz by means of Dorothy's trip. Here, however, an omniscient narration conducts the tour. Eventually, we enter a darkened bedroom. A hand holds a paperweight, and over this is superimposed a flurry of snow (3.45).

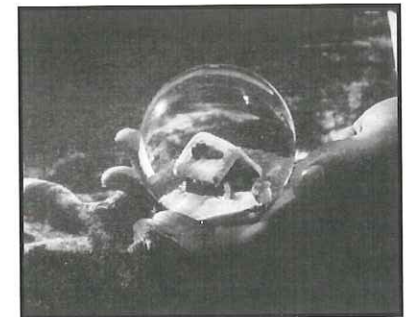
The image teases us. Is the narration making a lyrical comment on the action? Or is the image subjective, a glimpse into the dying man's mind or vision? In either case, the narration reveals its ability to command a great deal of story information. Our sense of omniscience is enhanced when, after the man dies, a nurse bustles into the room. Apparently, no character knows what we know.

At other points in the film, the omniscient narration calls attention to itself. During Susan's opera debut in Leland's flashback (6i), we see stagehands high above reacting to her performance. Most vivid is the omniscient narration at the end of the film. Thompson and the other reporters leave, never having learned the meaning of Rosebud. But we linger in the vast storeroom of Xanadu. And, thanks to the narration, we learn that Rosebud is the name of Kane's childhood sled. We can now associate the opening's emphasis on the snowy cottage with the closing scene's revelation of the sled.

This framing narration is truly omniscient. It withholds a key piece of story information at the outset, teases us with hints (the snow, the tiny cottage in the paperweight), and finally reveals at least part of the answer to the initial question. A return to the "No Trespassing" sign reminds us of our point of entry into the film. The film derives its unity not only from systematic choices about causality and time but also from a patterned narration that arouses curiosity and suspense and yields a surprise at the very end.



3.44 Deemphasizing Thompson. Camera angle and selective lighting make the reporter less important than the witnesses he interviews.



3.45 Narrational omniscience in *Citizen Kane*. The elusive image of the paperweight in *Citizen Kane*—seen by film viewers but not by any characters in the film.

SUMMARY

Not every analysis of a narrative film runs through all the categories we have covered here. Our purpose was as much to illustrate these concepts as to analyze *Citizen Kane*. With practice, you can become more familiar with these analytical tools and can use them flexibly, suiting your approach to the specific film at hand and the things that intrigue you about it. Should you become a filmmaker, all these matters, from cause-effect patterns to narrational organization, will confront you with a cascade of decisions. You may make your choices intuitively or through lots of thought and soul searching, but these remain essential dimensions of storytelling.

In looking at any narrative film, then, asking these questions will help you understand it better:

1. Which story events are directly presented to us in the plot, and which must we assume or infer? Is there any nondiegetic material given in the plot?
2. What is the earliest story event of which we learn? How does it relate to later events through a series of causes and effects?
3. How are story events connected in time? Have the filmmakers manipulated order, frequency, and duration in the plot so as to affect our understanding of events?
4. Does the closing reflect a clear-cut pattern of development that relates it to the opening? Do all

narrative lines achieve closure, or are some left open?

5. How does the narration present story information to us? Is it restricted to one or a few characters' knowledge, or does it range freely among the characters in different spaces? Does it give us considerable depth of story information by exploring the characters' mental states?
6. How closely does the film follow the conventions of the classical Hollywood cinema? If it departs significantly from those conventions, what formal principles does it use instead?

Most films that we see employ narrative form, and the great majority of theatrical movies stick to the premises of Hollywood storytelling. Still, there are other formal possibilities. We consider aspects of nonnarrative form in Chapter 10.

In the meantime, other matters will occupy us. In discussing form, we've been examining how we as viewers engage with the film's overall patterning. A film, however, also presents a complex blend of images and sounds. Like the overall architecture of film form, the finer grain of cinematic techniques involves the filmmaker in creative problem solving and decision making. Our experience of the film is shaped by the filmmaker's choice and control and patterning of those techniques. Part Three shows how this all happens.

PART

3

We are still trying to understand how a movie creates an absorbing experience for the viewer. Chapter 2 showed that the concept of form offers a way to grasp the film as a whole. Chapter 3 examined how narrative form can shape a film and our response to it. Later we'll see that filmmakers have employed other types of form in documentaries and experimental films.

When we see a film, though, we don't engage only with its overall form. We experience a *film*—not a painting or a novel. A painter knows how to manipulate color, shape, and composition. A novelist lives intimately with language. Likewise, filmmakers work with a distinct medium.

You're already somewhat aware of the creative choices available in the film medium. As a viewer you probably notice performance and color design. If you've made videos, you've become more aware of framing and composition, editing and sound. If you've tried your hand at making a fictional piece, you've already faced problems of staging and acting.

Part Three of this book gives you a chance to learn about film techniques in a systematic way. We look at two techniques governing the shot, mise-en-scene and cinematography. Then we consider the technique that relates shot to shot, editing. Then we consider the role that sound plays in relation to film images. A wrapup chapter returns to *Citizen Kane* and examines how it coordinates all these techniques with its narrative form.

Each chapter introduces a single technique, surveying the choices it offers to the filmmaker. We explore how various filmmakers have used the techniques. Several key questions will guide us: How can a technique shape the viewer's expectations? How may it furnish motifs for the film? How may a technique support the film's overall form—its story/plot relations or its narrational patterning? How may it direct our attention, clarify or emphasize meanings, and shape our emotional response?

The chapters that follow also explore how a film can organize its chosen techniques in consistent ways. This pattern of technical choices we call *style*. Style is what creates a movie's "look and feel." Late in each chapter, we focus on one or two particular films to show how the technique we're studying helps establish a distinctive style.

Film Style

CHAPTER

4

The Shot: Mise-en-Scene

Of all film techniques, **mise-en-scene** is the one that viewers notice most. After seeing a film, we may not recall the cutting or the camera movements, the dissolves or the offscreen sound. But we do remember the costumes in *Gone with the Wind* and the bleak, chilly lighting in Charles Foster Kane's *Xanadu*. We retain vivid impressions of the misty streets in *The Big Sleep* and the labyrinthine, fluorescent-lit lair of Buffalo Bill in *The Silence of the Lambs*. We recall Harpo Marx clambering over Edgar Kennedy's lemonade stand (*Duck Soup*) and Michael J. Fox escaping high-school bullies on an improvised skateboard (*Back to the Future*). Many of our most vivid memories of movies stem from mise-en-scene.

What Is Mise-en-Scene?

Consider this image from Quentin Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds* (4.1). Aldo Raine, a U.S. soldier on a mission to assassinate Hitler, has been captured by SS Colonel Hans Landa. The shot seems a simple one, but if you're starting to think like a filmmaker, you'll notice how Tarantino has shaped the image to accentuate the action and engage our attention.

The shot presents the two men facing each other behind a movie theater. The alley is rendered minimally, in dark colors and subdued lighting. By playing down the setting, Tarantino obliges us to concentrate on the confrontation.

Although both men are positioned in profile, the image doesn't give equal weight to each one. The cowl masks Aldo's face. This costume choice encourages us to concentrate on the face that we can see. The lighting is important as well. A

4.1 What attracts your eye? Elements of mise-en-scene accentuate action and engage attention in this scene from *Inglourious Basterds*, in which Aldo Raine is captured by Colonel Landa.



thread of illumination picks out the edge of Raine's cowl; without it, it would merge into the background. Again, however, it is Landa's face that gets greater emphasis. Strong lighting from above and left sharply outlines his profile, and a less powerful light (what filmmakers call *fill*) reveals his features.

Landa is emphasized in another way, through the actor's dialogue and facial expression. As Landa speaks, he shows delight in the capture of his quarry. His satisfaction bursts out when he chortles: "Alas, you're now in the hands of the SS—my hands, to be exact!" Letting the actor's hands fly up into the center of the frame and emphasizing them by the dialogue, Tarantino reminds us of the officer's florid self-assurance. This hand gesture will be developed when Landa playfully taps Raine's head with a forefinger: "I've been waiting a long time to touch you."

Although Tarantino has made many creative choices in this shot (notably the decision to film in a relatively close framing), certain techniques stand out. Setting, costume, lighting, and performance have all been coordinated to highlight Landa's gloating and remind us that he enjoys his cat-and-mouse interrogation tactics. Tarantino has shaped our experience of this story action by his decisions about mise-en-scene.

In the original French, *mise en scène* (pronounced meez-ahn-sen) means "putting into the scene," and it was first applied to the practice of directing plays. Film scholars, extending the term to film direction, use the term to signify the director's control over what appears in the film frame. As you would expect, mise-en-scene includes those aspects of film that overlap with the art of the theater: setting, lighting, costume and makeup, and staging and performance.

As the *Inglourious Basterds* shot suggests, mise-en-scene usually involves planning in advance. But the filmmaker may seize on unplanned events as well. An actor may add a line on the set, or an unexpected change in lighting may enhance a dramatic effect. While filming a cavalry procession through Monument Valley for *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*, John Ford took advantage of an approaching lightning storm to create a dramatic backdrop for the action (4.2). The storm remains part of the film's mise-en-scene even though Ford neither planned it nor controlled it; it was a lucky accident that helped create one of the film's most affecting passages. Jean Renoir, Robert Altman, and other directors have allowed their actors to improvise their performances, making the films' mise-en-scene more spontaneous and unpredictable.



4.2 Unplanned events and mise-en-scene. While filming *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*, John Ford took advantage of a thunderstorm in Monument Valley.

The Power of Mise-en-Scene

Filmmakers can use mise-en-scene to achieve realism, giving settings an authentic look or letting actors perform as naturally as possible. Throughout film history, however, audiences have also been attracted to fantasy, and mise-en-scene has often been used for this purpose. This attraction is evident in the work of cinema's first master of the technique, Georges Méliès. Méliès used highly original mise-en-scene to create an imaginary world on film.

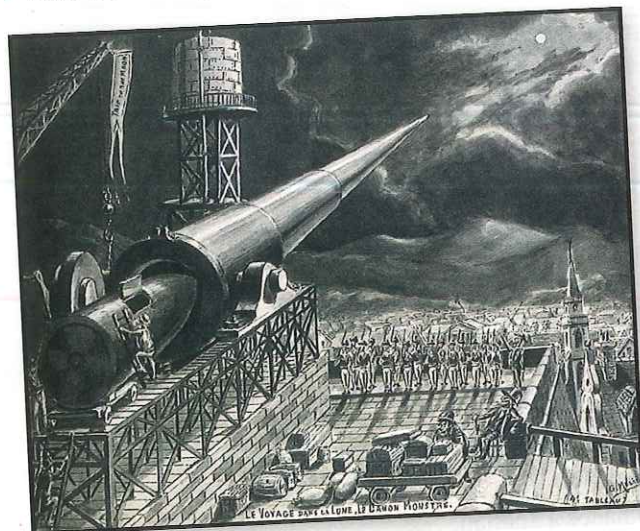
A caricaturist and stage magician, Méliès became fascinated by the Lumière brothers' demonstration of their short films in 1895. (For more on the Lumières, see p. 177.) After building a camera based on an English projector, Méliès began filming unstaged street scenes and moments of passing daily life. One day, the story goes, he was filming at the Place de l'Opéra, but his camera jammed as a bus was passing. By the time he could resume filming, the bus had gone and a hearse was in front of his lens. When Méliès screened the film, he discovered something



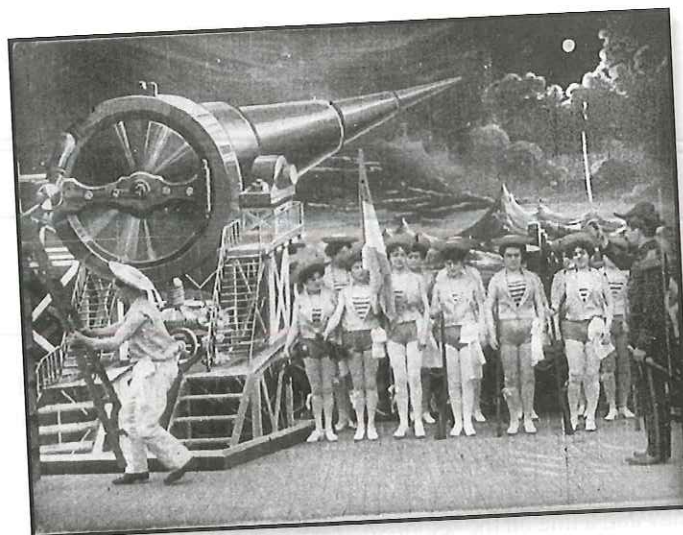
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For more on Méliès and his last years, visit our entry "Hugo: Scorsese's birthday present to Georges Méliès."

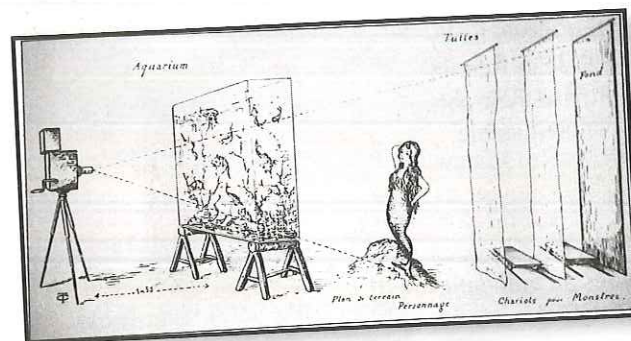
“When Buñuel was preparing *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*, he chose a tree-lined avenue for the recurring shot of his characters traipsing endlessly down it. The avenue was strangely stranded in open country and it perfectly suggested the idea of these people coming from nowhere and going nowhere. Buñuel’s assistant said, ‘You can’t use that road. It’s been used in at least ten other movies.’ ‘Ten other movies?’ said Buñuel, impressed. ‘Then it must be good.’”



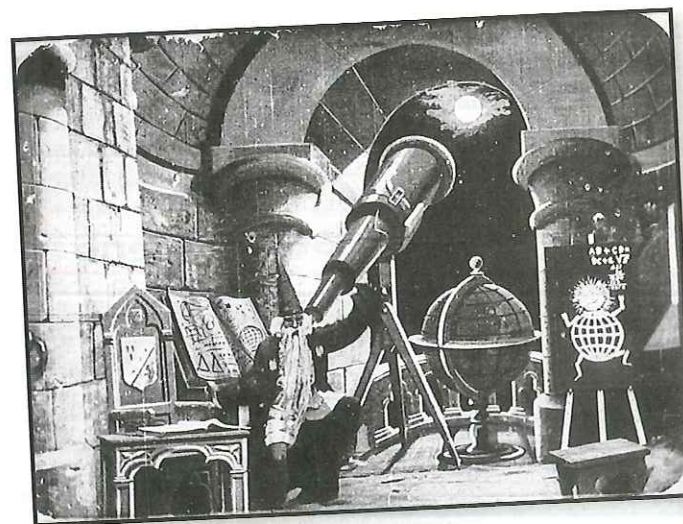
4.3



4.4



4.5



4.6

4.3–4.6 Méliès and mise-en-scene. Méliès made detailed plans for his shots, as seen in the drawing and final version of the rocket-launching scene in *A Trip to the Moon* (4.3–4.4). For *The Mermaid* (4.5) he summoned up an undersea world by placing a fish tank between the camera and an actress, some backdrops, and “carts for monsters.” In *La Lune à une mètre* (4.6) Méliès plays an astronomer. His study and its furnishings, including telescope, globe, and blackboard, are all painted cut-outs.

unexpected: a moving bus seemed to transform instantly into a hearse. Whether or not the anecdote is true, it at least illustrates Méliès’s recognition of the magical powers of mise-en-scene. He would devote most of his efforts to cinematic conjuring.

To do so would require preparation, since Méliès could not count on lucky accidents like the bus-hearse transformation. He would have to plan and stage action for the camera. Drawing on his theatrical experience, Méliès built one of the first film studios—a small, crammed affair bristling with balconies, trapdoors, and sliding backdrops. Total control was necessary to create the fantasy world he envisioned (4.3–4.6). He drew shots beforehand, designed sets and costumes, and devised elaborate special effects. As if this were not enough, Méliès starred in his own films (4.6).

Méliès’s “Star-Film” studio made hundreds of short fantasy and trick films based on a strict control over every element in the frame, and the first master of mise-en-scene demonstrated the resources of the technique. The legacy of Méliès’s magic is a delightfully unreal world wholly obedient to the whims of the imagination.

Components of Mise-en-Scene

Mise-en-scene offers the filmmaker four general areas of choice and control: setting, costumes and makeup, lighting, and staging (which includes acting and movement in the shot).

Setting

Since the earliest days of cinema, critics and audiences have understood that setting plays a more active role in cinema than it usually does in the theater. André Bazin writes:

The human being is all-important in the theatre. The drama on the screen can exist without actors. A banging door, a leaf in the wind, waves beating on the shore can heighten the dramatic effect. Some film masterpieces use man only as an accessory, like an extra, or in counterpoint to nature, which is the true leading character.

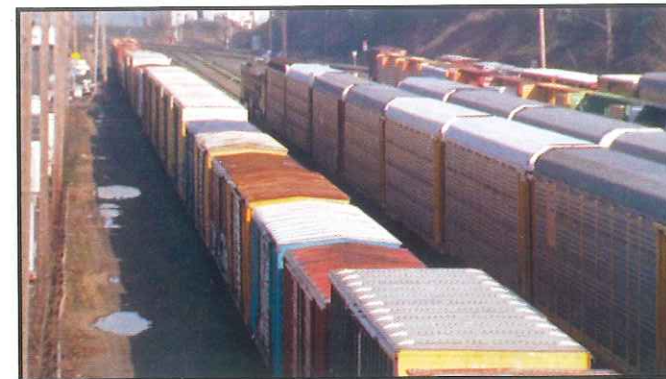
In a film, the setting can come to the forefront; it need not be only a container for human events but can dynamically enter the narrative action. Kelly Reichardt’s *Wendy and Lucy* begins with shots of a railroad yard as trains pass through (4.7). But we don’t see any people. Wendy, who is making her way across the United States by car, is later seen walking her dog Lucy in a park. The opening shots of the rail yard suggest the sort of neighborhoods where she must stay. At later points in the film, the roar and whistle of rail traffic will increase suspense, but not until the ending will we come to understand why the opening emphasized the trains.

The filmmaker may select an existing locale for the action. The very early short comedy *L’Arroseur arrosé* (“The Waterer Sprayed,” 4.8) was filmed in a garden. At the close of World War II, Roberto Rossellini shot *Germany Year Zero* in the rubble of Berlin (4.9). Alternatively, the filmmaker may construct the setting. Méliès understood that shooting in a studio increased his control, and many filmmakers followed his lead. In France, Germany, and especially the United States, commercial filmmaking became centered on studio facilities in which every aspect of mise-en-scene could be manipulated.

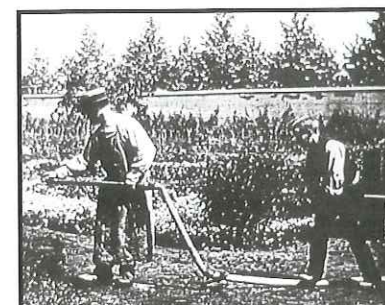
Some directors have emphasized authenticity even in purpose-built settings. For example, Erich von Stroheim prided himself on meticulous research into details of locale for the sets of *Greed* (4.10). *All the President’s Men* (1976) took a similar tack, seeking to duplicate the *Washington Post* office on a sound stage (4.11). Other films have been less committed to accuracy. Though D. W. Griffith studied the various historical periods presented in *Intolerance*, his Babylon constitutes a personal image of that city (4.12). Similarly, in *Ivan the Terrible*, Sergei Eisenstein freely stylized the decor of the czar’s palace to harmonize with the lighting, costume, and figure movement, so that characters crawl through doorways that resemble mouseholes and stand frozen before symbolic murals (4.13).

Setting can overwhelm the actors, as in Wim Wender’s *Wings of Desire* (4.14), or it can be reduced to almost nothing, as in Francis Ford Coppola’s *Bram Stoker’s Dracula* (4.15). The overall design of a setting can shape how we understand story action. In Louis Feuillade’s silent crime serial *The Vampires*, a criminal gang has killed a courier on his way to a bank. The gang’s confederate, Irma Vep, is also a bank employee, and just as she tells her superior that the courier has vanished, an imposter, in beard and bowler hat, strolls in behind them (4.16). They turn away from us in surprise as he comes forward (4.17). Working in a period when cutting to closer shots was rare in a French film, Feuillade draws our attention to the man by centering him in the doorway.

But suppose a filmmaker is using a more crowded locale. How can a compact setting yield smooth drama? The heroine of Juzo Itami’s *Tampopo* is a widow who



4.7 Setting creates narrative expectations. The railway yard at the opening of *Wendy and Lucy* is a setting that will take on significance later in the film.



4.8



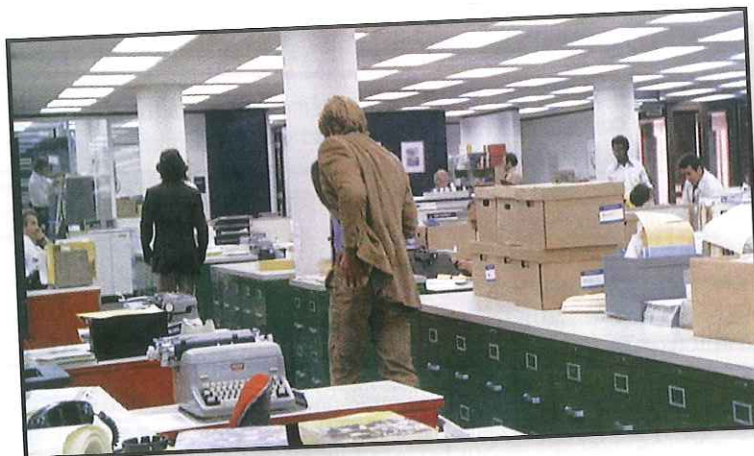
4.9

4.8–4.9 Actual locations used as setting. Although Louis Lumière’s cameramen were famous for documentary filming, they also made fictional narratives such as the 1895 *L’Arroseur arrosé* (4.8). Roberto Rossellini’s *Germany Year Zero* (4.9) maintained the tradition of staging fictional stories in actual locations.

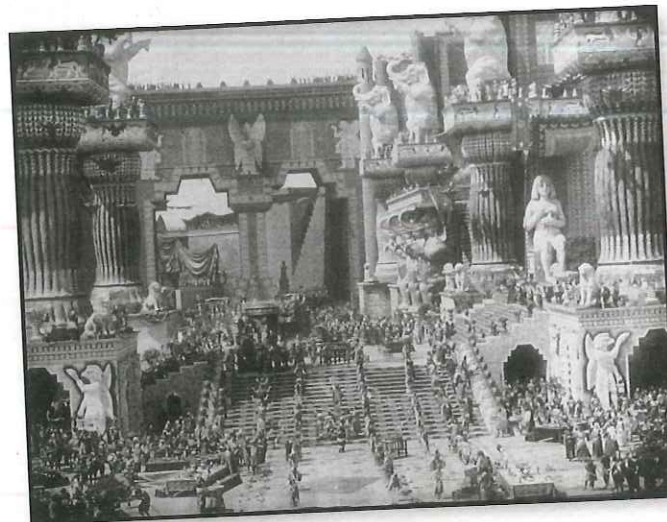


4.10

4.10–4.11 Authenticity in constructed settings. Details such as posters and hanging flypaper create a tavern scene in *Greed* (4.10). To replicate an actual newsroom in *All the President's Men* (4.11), even wastepaper from the actual office was scattered around the set.



4.11



4.12

4.12–4.13 Stylized settings. The Babylonian sequences of *Intolerance* (4.12) combined influences from Assyrian history, 19th-century biblical illustration, and modern dance. In *Ivan the Terrible, Part 2*, the décor (4.13) dominates the characters.



4.13



4.14

4.14–4.15 The interplay of setting and actors. In *Wings of Desire*, busy, colorful graffiti draw attention away from the man lying on the ground (4.14). In contrast, in *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, apart from the candles, the setting of this scene has been obliterated by darkness (4.15).



4.15

is trying to improve the food she serves in her restaurant. In one scene, a cowboy-hatted truck driver takes her to another noodle shop to watch professionals do business. Itami has staged the scene so that the kitchen and the counter serve as two arenas for the action. At first, the widow watches the noodle-man take orders, sitting by her mentor on the edge of the kitchen (4.18). Quickly, the counter fills with customers calling out orders. The truck driver challenges her to match the orders with the customers, and she steps closer to the center of the kitchen (4.19). After she calls out the orders correctly, she turns her back to us, and our interest shifts to the customers, who applaud her (4.20).

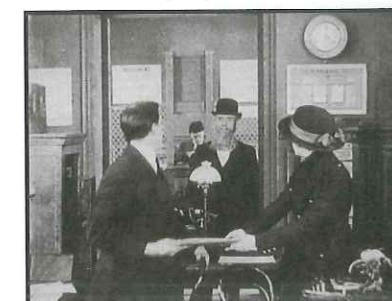
As the *Tampopo* example shows, color can be an important component of settings. The dark colors of the kitchen surfaces make the widow's red dress stand out. Robert Bresson's *L'Argent* parallels its settings by drab green backgrounds and cold blue props and costumes (4.21–4.23). In contrast, Jacques Tati's *Play Time* displays sharply changing color schemes. In the first portion of *Play Time*, the settings and costumes are mostly gray, brown, and black—cold, steely colors. Later in the film, however, beginning in the restaurant scene, the settings start to sport cheery reds, pinks, and greens. This change in the settings' colors supports a narrative development that shows an inhuman city landscape that is transformed by vitality and spontaneity.

A full-size setting need not always be built. Through much of the history of the cinema, filmmakers have used miniature buildings to create fantasy scenes or simply to economize. Parts of settings could also be rendered as paintings and combined photographically with full-sized sections of the space. Now, digital special effects can conjure up settings in comparable ways. When the makers of *Angels & Demons* were refused permission to shoot in Vatican City, they built partial sets of St. Peter's Square and the Pantheon, then filled in the missing stretches (4.24, 4.25).

In manipulating a shot's setting, the filmmaker may use a *prop*, short for *property*. This is another term borrowed from theatrical mise-en-scene. When



4.16



4.17

4.16–4.17 Setting guides attention. In *The Vampires*, a background frame created by a large doorway emphasizes the importance of an entering character.



4.18

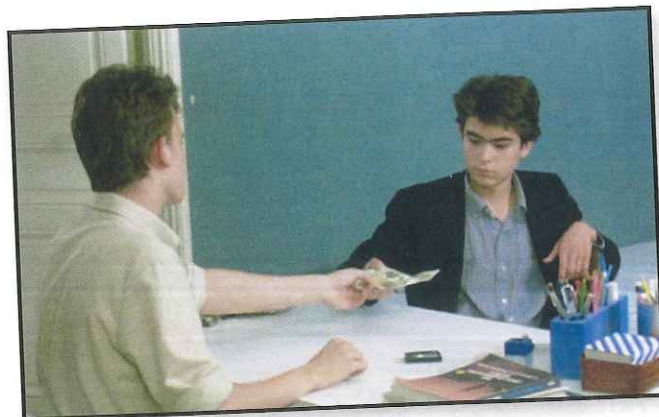


4.19



4.20

4.18–4.20 Activating areas of a setting. In *Tampopo*, at the start of the scene (4.18), the noodle counter, with only two customers, occupies the center of the action. The widow and her truck driver mentor stand inconspicuously at the left. After the counter is full (4.19), the dramatic emphasis shifts to the kitchen when the widow rises and takes the challenge to name the customers' orders. Her red dress helps draw attention to her. When she has triumphantly matched the orders, she gets a round of applause (4.20). By turning her away from us, Itami once more emphasizes the rear counter.



4.21



4.22



4.23

4.21–4.23 Color creates parallels among settings. Color links the affluent home in *L'Argent* (4.21) to the prison (4.22) and later to the old woman's home (4.23).



4.24

4.24–4.25 Digital set replacement. Only a portion of the buildings lining St. Peter's Square were built for *Angels & Demons*. The remainder of the set was covered with greenscreens during filming. Digital matte paintings were added to create major elements like the colonnades at the sides and the tops of the background buildings.



4.25

an object in the setting has a function within the ongoing action, we can call it a prop. Films teem with examples: the snowstorm paperweight that shatters at the beginning of *Citizen Kane*, the little girl's balloon in *M*, the cactus rose in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, Sarah Connor's hospital bed turned exercise machine in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*. Comedies often use props to create gags (4.26).

Over the course of a narrative, a prop may become a motif. In Alexander Payne's *Election*, the fussy, frustrated high school teacher is shown cleaning out spoiled food

and hallway litter, and these actions prepare for the climactic moment when he crumples a ballot and secretly disposes of it (4.27–4.29). Payne calls this the motif of trash, “of throwing things away, since that’s in fact the climax of the film. . . . So we establish it early on.” Color may help props become motifs. In some scenes of *Finye* (*The Wind*), the recurrent use of orange creates a cluster of nature motifs (4.30–4.32). When we look at *Our Hospitality* later in the chapter, we’ll examine how elements of setting, particularly props, can weave through a film to create motifs.

Costume and Makeup

If you were planning a film, you’d probably give as much attention to what your actors wear as you pay to their surroundings. Like setting, costume can have a great variety of specific functions in the film’s overall form.

Costumes can play causal roles in film plots. In the runaway bus section of *Speed*, Annie’s outfit provides the clue that allows Jack to outwit the bomber Howard. During a phone conversation Howard refers to Annie as a “Wildcat.” Noticing Annie’s University of Arizona sweater, Jack realizes that Howard must have hidden a video camera on the bus. Less obviously, costumes can become motifs, enhancing characterization and tracing changes in attitude (4.33–4.36).

In other films, costumes can be used for their purely graphic qualities. Throughout *Ivan the Terrible*, robes and capes are orchestrated with one another in their colors, their textures, and even the way they flow (4.37). *Freak Orlando* boldly uses costumes to display primary colors with maximum intensity (4.38).

In these last examples, as well as in *Tampopo* (4.18–4.20) and *L'Argent* (4.21–4.23), costume is coordinated with setting. Since the filmmaker usually wants to emphasize the human figures, setting may provide a more or less neutral background, while costume helps pick out the characters. Color design is particularly



4.26 Comic use of props. The irresponsible protagonist of *Groundhog Day* eats an enormous breakfast; all the dishes serve as props in the diner setting.

“The best sets are the simplest, most ‘decent’ ones; everything should contribute to the feeling of the story and anything that does not do this has no place. Reality is usually too complicated. Real locations contain too much that is extreme or contradictory and always require some simplifying: taking things away, unifying colors, etc. This strength through simplicity is much easier to achieve on a built set than in an existing location.”

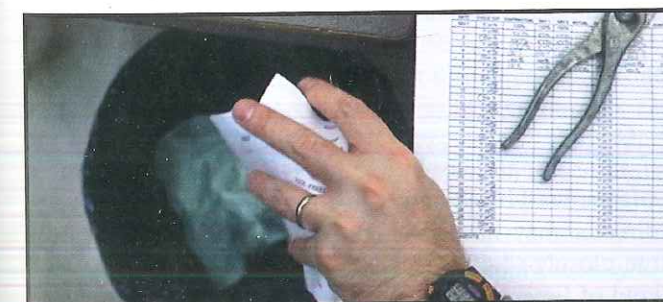
—Stuart Craig, art director, *Notting Hill*



4.27



4.28



4.29

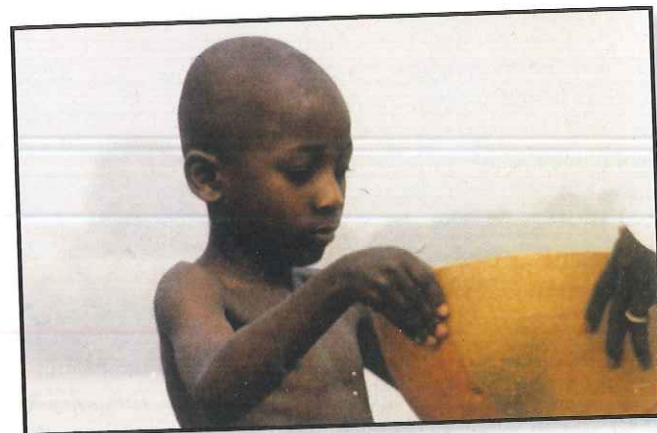
4.27–4.29 Props as motifs in *Election*. As he discards spoiled leftovers, the teacher is suspiciously watched by the custodian—who will play an important role in his downfall (4.27). He tosses a scrap of paper into the corridor trash bin (4.28). The motif culminates in a close-up of the teacher’s hand discarding the crucial vote for student council president (4.29).



4.30



4.31



4.32

4.30–4.32 Color as a motif. Souleymane Cissé's *Finye* begins with a woman carrying an orange calabash as the wind rustles through foliage (4.30). Later, the vengeful grandfather prepares to stalk his grandson's persecutor by dressing in orange and making magic before a fire (4.31). At the end, the little boy passes his bowl to someone offscreen (4.32)—possibly a couple seen earlier in the film.



4.33



4.34

4.33–4.34 Costume and character. In a poignant moment in Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation*, the Little Sister decorates her shabby dress with "ermine" made of cotton dotted with spots of soot (4.33). The image suggests both her effort to be elegant and her realization of her poverty. In Fellini's *8½*, the film director Guido persistently uses his dark glasses (4.34) to shield himself from the world.

“The costume is a very important thing. It speaks before you do. You know what you're looking at. You get a reference and it gives context about the other characters and their relationships.”

—Harrison Ford, actor

important here. The *Freak Orlando* costumes (4.38) stand out boldly against the neutral gray background of an artificial lake. In *The Night of the Shooting Stars*, luminous wheat fields set off the hard black-and-blue costumes of the fascists and the peasants (4.39). The director may instead choose to match the color values of setting and costume more closely (4.40). This “bleeding” of the costume into the setting is carried to a kind of limit in the prison scene of *THX 1138*, in which George Lucas strips both locale and clothing to stark white on white (4.41).



4.35



4.36

4.35–4.36 Costume and character change. When Hildy Johnson, in *His Girl Friday*, switches from her role of aspiring housewife to that of reporter, her hats change as well—from a stylish number with a low-dipping brim (4.35) to a more “masculine” hat with its brim pushed up, journalist-style (4.36).



4.37



4.38

4.37–4.38 Graphic qualities of costumes. In *Ivan the Terrible*, the sweeping folds of a priest's lightweight black robe contrast with the heavy cloak and train of the czar's furs (4.37). In *Freak Orlando*, stylized costumes with intense, primary colors are featured (4.38). The director, Ulrike Ottinger, is a professional costume designer.

Women in Love affords a clear example of how costume and setting can contribute to a film's narrative progression. The opening scenes portray the characters' shallow middle-class life by means of saturated primary and complementary colors in costume and setting (4.42). In the middle portions of the film, as the characters discover love on a country estate, pale pastels predominate (4.43). The last section of *Women in Love* takes place around the Matterhorn, and the characters' ardor has cooled. Now the colors have almost disappeared, and scenes are dominated by pure black and white (4.44). By combining with setting, costumes may reinforce narrative and thematic patterns.

Computer technology can graft virtual costumes onto fully computer-generated characters, like Gollum in *The Lord of the Rings* or the many extras in the backgrounds of big crowd scenes. Entirely digital costumes for human actors are less common, but fantasy and science fiction films use them (4.45).

Many of these points about costume apply equally to a closely related area of mise-en-scene, the actors' makeup. In the early days of cinema, makeup was necessary because



4.39 Color contrast of costume and setting. In the climactic skirmish of *The Night of the Shooting Stars*, the dark costumes stand out starkly against the more neutral background.



4.40



4.41

4.40–4.41 Color coordinates costume and setting. Fellini's *Casanova* creates a color gradation that runs from bright red costumes to paler red walls (4.40), the whole composition capped by a small white accent in the distance. In *THX 1138*, heads seem to float in space as white costumes blend into white settings (4.41).



4.42



4.43



4.44

4.42–4.44 Costume, setting, and narrative. Bright colors in an early scene of *Women in Love* (4.42) give way to the softer hues of trees and fields (4.43) and finally to a predominantly white-and-black scheme (4.44), contributing to the progression of the story.



4.45 Virtual costume. *Watchmen*'s superhero Rorschach wears a hood with moving black patterns. In postproduction, a digital simulation of ink flowing through the fibers was superimposed on the actor's face.

actors' faces would not register well on film stocks. Over the course of film history, a wide range of possibilities emerged. Dreyer's *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* was famous for its complete avoidance of makeup (4.46). For *Ivan the Terrible*, however, Nikolai Cherkasov plays the czar wearing a wig and a false beard, nose, and eyebrows (4.47). Changing actors to look like historical personages has been one common function of makeup.

Makeup is most noticeable in horror and science fiction

films, and the popularity of those genres contributed new technology to the craft. Rubber and plasticine compounds can create bumps, bulges, extra organs, and layers of artificial skin. Now other genres are utilizing those resources (4.48–4.50).

Today the hope is for makeup generally to pass unnoticed, and quietly accentuate expressive qualities of the actor's face. Because the camera may record cruel details that we wouldn't notice in ordinary life, unsuitable blemishes, wrinkles, and sagging skin will have to be hidden. The makeup artist can sculpt the face, making it seem narrower or broader by applying blush and shadow. Viewers expect that female performers will wear lipstick and other cosmetics, but the male actors are usually wearing makeup as well.



4.46 Plain faces. Pale backgrounds focus attention on the actors' faces in many shots of *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc*. The actors wore no makeup, and the director, Carl Dreyer, relied on close-ups and tiny facial changes to create an intense religious drama.



4.47 Makeup interprets a historical figure. In *Ivan the Terrible, Part 1*, makeup shapes the eyebrows and hollows the eye sockets to emphasize Ivan's piercing gaze, a central feature in director Sergei Eisenstein's conception of the all-knowing czar.



4.48



4.49

4.48–4.50 Creative choices in makeup. Tilda Swinton (4.48) is an actor who enjoys experimenting with makeup. In the futuristic fantasy *Snowpiercer*, she and her makeup designer used an artificial nose, protruding teeth, and vibrant lipstick to create a grotesque, tyrannical administrator (4.49). For *The Grand Budapest Hotel*, director Wes Anderson exploited the new makeup technology for grotesque comedy. To portray an elderly woman, Swinton wore 11 pieces of prosthetic makeup on her neck, chin, earlobes, forehead, and nose—along with five wig pieces (4.50).



4.50



4.51



4.52

4.51–4.52 Makeup: Man and woman. In *Speed*, Sandra Bullock's eyeliner, shadow, and arched brows make her eyes vivid and give her an alert expression (4.51). For the same scene, the eyeliner on Keanu Reeves makes the upper edges of his eyes stand out (4.52). Note the somewhat fierce slope of the eyebrows, accentuating his slight frown.



4.53



4.54

4.53–4.54 Digital makeup. In *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, Ralph Fiennes's nose was removed and replaced with nostrils appropriate to the snake-like Lord Voldemort (4.53). When two clones of the same man get into a fight in *Moon*, a stunt man wearing a green hood with motion-capture dots played one of the clones (4.54). Actor Sam Rockwell's head was shot separately and then inserted into the scene.

Film actors rely on their eyes to a great extent (see A Closer Look, p. 134), and makeup artists can often enhance facial performance. Eyeliner and mascara can emphasize the direction of a glance. Nearly every actor will also have expressively shaped eyebrows—lengthened eyebrows can enlarge the face; shorter brows make the face seem more compact. Eyebrows plucked in a slightly rising curve add gaiety to the face, but slightly sloping ones hint at sadness. Thick, straight brows commonly applied to men reinforce the impression of a hard, serious gaze (4.51, 4.52).

Although most makeup continues to be physically applied to actors' faces, digital technology can be used as well. Minor cleanups remove flaws or shadows from faces. More drastically, a villain can lose a nose or, via head replacement, an actor can play two roles in the same shot (4.53, 4.54). Computer-generated imagery (CGI) has extended the importance of makeup, because now the filmmaker can sculpt entire bodies. Gary Sinise's legs were removed so that he could play an amputee in *Forrest Gump*, and a muscular actor was made to look thin and weak before becoming a superhero in *Captain America: The First Avenger*.

Lighting

If you've shot videos with your cellphone or camera, you may not have thought much about manipulating lighting. Modern digital capture can produce a legible

“Light is everything. It expresses ideology, emotion, colour, depth, style. It can efface, narrate, describe. With the right lighting, the ugliest face, the most idiotic expression can radiate with beauty or intelligence.”

—Federico Fellini, director

image in bright or dark situations, and for many purposes, all that matters is that the subject be visible. But the practiced filmmaker wants more than legibility. The image should have pictorial impact, and for that it's vital to control the lighting. Not many actual situations would yield the delicate edge lighting or facial fill light we saw in our shot from *Inglourious Basterds* (4.1).

In artistic filmmaking, lighting is more than just illumination that permits us to see the action. Lighter and darker areas within the frame help create the overall composition of each shot and guide our attention to certain objects and actions. A brightly illuminated patch may draw our eye to a key gesture, while a shadow may conceal a detail or build up suspense about what may be present. Lighting can also articulate textures: the curve of a face, the grain of a piece of wood, the tracery of a spider's web, the sparkle of a gem.

Highlights and Shadows Lighting shapes objects by creating *highlights* and *shadows*. A highlight is a patch of relative brightness on a surface. The man's face in 4.55 and the edge of the fingers in 4.56 display highlights. Highlights provide important cues to the texture of the surface. If the surface is smooth, like glass or chrome, the highlights tend to gleam or sparkle; a rougher surface, like a coarse stone facing, yields more diffuse highlights. Shadows likewise do the same, allowing objects to have portions of darkness (called *shading*) or to cast their shadows onto something else. Thus the fingers in 4.56 are visible partly because they are shaded, while the stark vertical shadows of 4.55 imply prison bars offscreen.

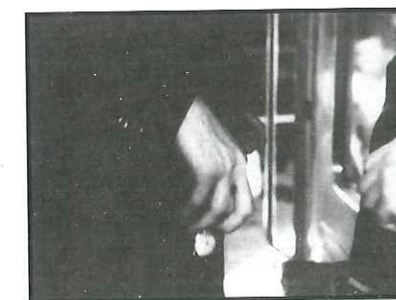
Lighting creates not only textures but also overall shape. If a ball is lit straight on from the front, it appears round. If the same ball is lit from the side, we see it as a half-circle. Hollis Frampton's short film *Lemon* consists primarily of light moving around a lemon, and the shifting shadows and shading create dramatically changing patterns of yellow and black. This film almost seems designed to prove the truth of a remark made by Josef von Sternberg: “The proper use of light can embellish and dramatize every object.”

Lighting joins with setting in controlling our sense of a scene's space. In 4.55, a few shadows imply an entire prison cell. Lighting also shapes a shot's overall composition. One image from John Huston's *Asphalt Jungle* welds the gang members into a unit by the pool of light cast by a hanging lamp. At the same time, the lighting sets up a scale of importance, emphasizing the protagonist by making him the most frontal and clearly lit figure (4.57).

Quality For our purposes, we can say that filmmakers exploit and explore four major aspects of lighting: its quality, direction, source, and color. Lighting *quality* refers to the relative intensity of the illumination. *Hard* lighting creates clearly defined shadows, crisp textures, and sharp edges, whereas *soft* lighting creates a diffused illumination. In nature, the noonday sun creates hard light, whereas an overcast



4.55



4.56



4.57

4.55–4.57 Highlights and shadows. In Cecil B. DeMille's *The Cheat*, the man's face and body display highlights (4.55), while the cast shadows suggest the unseen bars of a jail cell. In Robert Bresson's *Pickpocket*, the edge of the fingers display highlights (4.56), while the hand is subtly modeled by shading. Shadows on faces create a dramatic composition in John Huston's *Asphalt Jungle* (4.57).

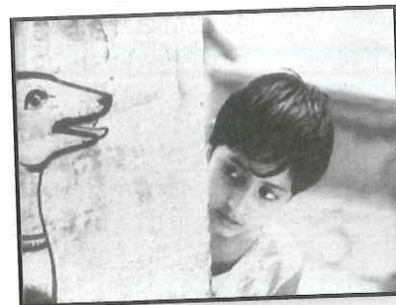
“Every light has a point where it is brightest and a point toward which it wanders to lose itself completely. . . . The journey of rays from that central core to the outposts of blackness is the adventure and drama of light.”

—Josef von Sternberg

4.58–4.59 Hard versus soft lighting. In Satyajit Ray's *Aparajito*, Apu's mother and the globe she holds are emphasized by hard lighting (4.58). In another shot from the same film (4.59), softer lighting blurs contours and textures and makes for more diffusion and gentler contrasts between light and shade.



4.58



4.59



4.60



4.61

4.60–4.61 Hard and soft lighting in color. The spy thriller *Skyfall* shows James Bond returning from near death to international intrigue. Hard lighting in early scenes gives his face a haggard, worn look aided by makeup (including pink-rimmed eyes). Once he's back in action in a Macau casino, Bond's face is sculpted by gentler shading and softer illumination. The difference is enhanced by the neutral, colorless lighting in 4.60 and the warmer glow in 4.61.



4.62 Frontal lighting. In Jean-Luc Godard's *La Chinoise*, frontal lighting eliminates most surface shading and makes the actress's shadow fall directly behind her, where we cannot see it.



4.63 Side lighting. In *Touch of Evil*, directed by Orson Welles, light from the left creates sharp shading of the character's nose, cheek, and lips.

sky creates soft light. The terms are relative, and many lighting situations will fall between the extremes, but we can usually recognize the differences (4.58–4.61).

Direction The *direction* of lighting in a shot refers to the path of light from its source or sources to the object lit. For convenience we can distinguish among frontal lighting, sidelighting, backlighting, underlighting, and top lighting.

Frontal lighting can be recognized by its tendency to eliminate shadows. In 4.62, from Jean-Luc Godard's *La Chinoise*, the result of such frontal lighting is a fairly flat-looking image. Contrast 4.63, in which a hard **sidelight** (also called a **crosslight**) sculpts the character's features.

Backlighting, as the name suggests, comes from behind the subject. The light can be positioned at many angles: high above the figure, at various angles off to the side, pointing straight at the camera, or from below. Used with no other sources of light, backlighting tends to create silhouettes, as in 4.64. Combined with more frontal sources of light, the technique can create a subtle contour, as we saw with



4.64 Backlighting. In Godard's *Passion*, the lamp and window provide backlighting that presents the woman almost entirely in silhouette.

Raine's black cowl in *Inglourious Basterds* (4.1). This use of backlighting is called **edge lighting** or **rim lighting** (4.65).

As its name implies, **underlighting** suggests that the light comes from below the subject. Since underlighting tends to distort features, it is often used to create dramatic horror effects, but it may also simply indicate a realistic light source, such as a fireplace, or, as in 4.66, a flashlight. As usual, a particular technique can function differently according to context.

Top lighting is exemplified by 4.67, where the spotlight shines down from almost directly above Marlene Dietrich's face. Here top lighting creates a glamorous image. In our earlier example from *Asphalt Jungle* (4.57), the light from above is harder, in keeping with the conventional harshness of crime films. Director Jacques Audiard chose to use top lighting with very little fill in his prison drama *A Prophet*: "It's a matter of realism—everything is not visible all the time" (4.68).

Source Lighting has a quality, and it has direction. It can also be characterized by its *source*. In making a documentary, the filmmaker may be obliged to shoot with whatever light is available. Most fictional films, however, use extra light sources to obtain greater control of the image's look. Typically the table lamps and streetlights you see in a set aren't strong or varied enough to create a powerful image. Still, the filmmaker will usually create a lighting design that seems consistent with the sources in the setting. The pattern of illumination is motivated by the visible sources. (See p. 63.)

Look back at Figure 4.1, the confrontation in *Inglourious Basterds*. The pattern of light we see is roughly consistent with the source in the shot, the street lamp in the alley. But that lamp at that distance could not produce the hard light on Landa's head or the fill light that reveals his features. In 4.69, from *The Miracle Worker*, the window in the rear and the lantern in the right foreground appear to be the sources of illumination, but many studio lights supplemented them.

Directors and cinematographers manipulating the lighting of the scene typically decide on two primary sources: a **key light** and a **fill light**. The key light is the primary source, providing the brightest illumination and casting the strongest shadows. The key light is the most directional light, and it is usually suggested by a light source in the setting. A fill is a less intense illumination that "fills in," softening or eliminating shadows cast by the key light. By combining key and fill, and by adding other sources, lighting can be controlled quite exactly.

The key lighting source may be aimed at the subject from any angle, as we've seen. In our shot from *The Sixth Sense* (4.66), underlighting may be the key source, while a softer and dimmer fill falls on the setting in the background. Lights from various directions are often combined.



4.68 Top lighting for realism. Since actors' eyes are crucial to their performances, most filmmakers light scenes to make the eyes visible. But in the prison cells of *A Prophet*, harsh single-source lighting from above often renders the eyes as dark patches, making the characters more sinister and inscrutable.



4.69 Motivating light sources. In this shot from *The Miracle Worker*, motivated light from the window and lantern is enhanced by offscreen studio lights. If you look closely, you can see the extra sources reflected in the lantern.



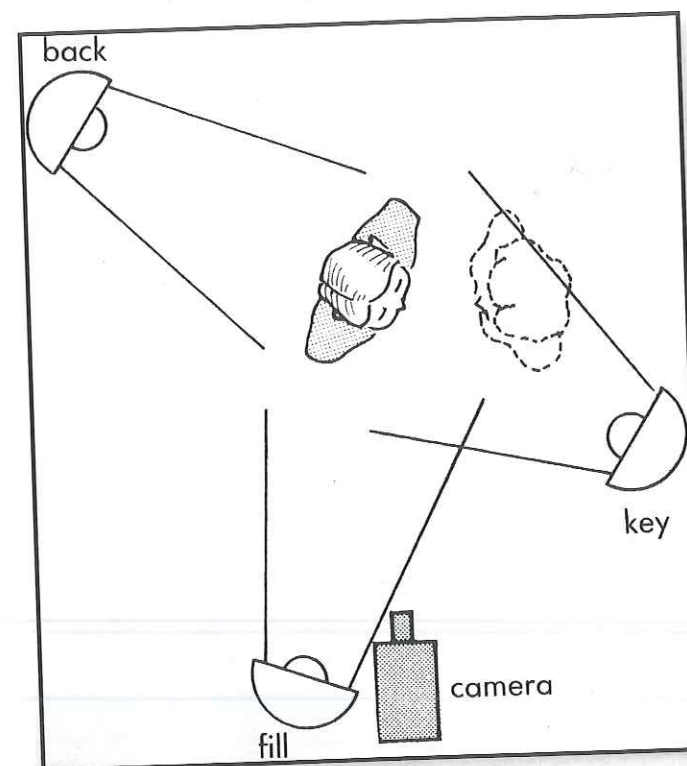
4.65 Edge, or rim, lighting. Edge lighting makes the outline of each actor's body stand out from the background. This shot from *Wings* shows edge lighting on many parts of the frame, especially along the actors' faces and hair and on the edge of the porch.



4.66 Underlighting. In *The Sixth Sense*, a flashlight lights the boy's face from below, enhancing our empathy with his fright as he feels the presence of a ghost.



4.67 Top lighting for glamour. Director Josef Von Sternberg frequently used a high frontal light to bring out the cheekbones of his star, as shown here in *Shanghai Express*.



4.70 Three-point lighting, one of the basic techniques of Hollywood cinema.



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We discuss a lecture on lighting by master cinematographer Steven Poster (*Donnie Darko*) in "Light is a law."

key light for one can serve as backlight for the other, and the fill light can serve as the second character's key.

A more complex arrangement is shown in 4.72, also from *Laura*. Here the wall chandelier behind Waldo and Laura motivates two lighting patterns. On her, the key now comes from the left, the fill from the right, and backlighting from above. On Waldo, the key strikes his forehead and nose from the upper right, with the fill coming from off left, rather close to the camera, as in 4.70. Top light creates a highlight



4.71



4.72

4.71–4.72 Three-point lighting on the screen. In 4.71, light from different directions makes Laura stand out from the dim background, while enhancing the volume of her face. In 4.72, each character gets the three-point treatment. Shots like this remind us that there were many lighting units hanging from the ceiling of the Hollywood studio, each one helping to sculpt the actors' images.

Classical Hollywood filmmaking developed the custom of using at least three light sources per shot: key light, fill light, and backlight. The most basic arrangement of **three-point lighting** on a single figure is shown in 4.70. The *backlight* typically comes from behind and above the figure, the *key light* comes diagonally from the front, and a *fill light* comes from a position near the camera. The key will usually be closer to the figure or brighter than the fill.

In 4.71, the title character of *Laura* is given glamorous three-point lighting. As in 4.70, the key light is off right, brightening that side of her face. A fill light from the left shades her cheek and chin while softening the shadow of her nose. This balancing of key and fill models her face to a greater degree than straight-on frontal lighting would. (Compare 4.62.)

A bright backlight from the upper rear illuminates her hat and gives a sharp edge to her shoulders. Even the left side of her hat brim is given volume and texture, thanks to shading and edge lighting. Other fill lights, called *background* or *set lighting*, fall on the setting behind her. As if this weren't enough, small lights close to the camera give her eyes a sparkle. Such *eye lights* were often used in close views.

Typically, each major character in a scene will have his or her own key light, fill light, and backlight. When characters face one another, as with the dotted figure in 4.70, the

on his hair, while backlighting creates a thin line of brightness along his head, ear, neck, and collar.

Three-point lighting emerged during the studio era of Hollywood filmmaking, and it is still widely used, as in 4.73.

We've referred to key, fill, and backlight as separate sources, but in production there will often be many lighting units providing each of those. Several lamps, for instance, might be recruited to provide a strong key light. Moreover, you've probably already realized that this three-point lighting system demands that the lamps be rearranged virtually every time the camera shifts to a new framing. In spite of the great cost involved, most commercial filmmakers choose to adjust lighting for each camera position. Changing light sources this way isn't very realistic, but it does enable filmmakers to make each shot a clear and vivid composition.

Three-point lighting was particularly well suited for the high-key lighting used in classical Hollywood cinema and other filmmaking traditions. **High-key lighting** refers to an overall lighting design that uses fill light and backlight to create relatively low contrast between brighter and darker areas. Usually, the light quality is soft, making shadow areas fairly transparent. The frames from *Laura* (4.71, 4.72) and *Amélie* (4.73) exemplify high-key lighting. Hollywood directors and cinematographers have chosen this pattern for comedies and most dramas.

High-key lighting is used simply to render a brightly lit situation, such as a dazzling ballroom in the afternoon. High-key lighting is an overall approach to illumination that suggests different lighting conditions or times of day. Consider for example the frames from *Back to the Future*. The first shot (4.74) uses high-key illumination matched to daylight and a brightly lit malt shop. The second frame (4.75) is from a scene set in a room at night, but it still uses the high-key approach, as can be seen from the lighting's softness, its low contrast, and its detail in shadow areas.

Low-key lighting creates contrasts and sharper, darker shadows. Often the lighting is hard, and the shadows are lessened or eliminated altogether. The effect is of *chiaroscuro*, or extremely dark and light regions within the image. An example is 4.76, from *Koolhaas*. Here the fill light and background light are less intense than in high-key technique. As a result, shadow areas on the left third of the screen remain hard and fairly opaque. In 4.77, a low-key shot from Leos Carax's *Mauvais sang*, the key light is hard and comes from the left side. Carax eliminates both fill and background illumination, creating very sharp shadows and a dark void around the characters.



4.73 Three-point lighting in high key. In *Amélie*, the light-hearted romantic tone is enhanced by high-key, three-point lighting. Its layout of sources is similar to that shown in 4.70.

“When taking close-ups in a colour picture, there is too much visual information in the background, which tends to draw attention away from the face. That is why the faces of the actresses in the old black and white pictures are so vividly remembered. Even now, movie fans nostalgically recall Dietrich . . . Garbo . . . Lamarr . . . Why? Filmed in black and white, those figures looked as if they were lit from within. When a face appeared on the screen over-exposed—the high-key technique, which also erased imperfections—it was as if a bright object was emerging from the screen.”

—Nestor Almendros, cinematographer



4.74



4.75

4.74–4.75 High-key lighting for different times and settings. *Back to the Future*: A brightly lit malt shop in daytime (4.74) and Doc's laboratory at night (4.75) both get the high-key treatment.



4.76

4.76–4.77 Low-key lighting. In Andrzej Wajda's *Kanal*, low-key lighting creates a harsh highlight on one side of the woman's face, a shadow on the other (4.76). The shadow on the man's face is even darker and sharper. In *Mauvais sang*, a single key light without any fill on the actress's face leaves her expression nearly invisible (4.77).



4.77



4.78

4.78–4.80 Light, constant or changing? At the end of Fellini's *Nights of Cabiria*, the heroine moves diagonally toward us, accompanied by a band of young street musicians (4.78). As she walks, the lighting on her face does not vary, enabling us to notice slight changes in her expression (4.79). By contrast, the sword fight in *Rashomon* is intensified by the contrast between the ferocious combat and the cheerfully dappled lighting pouring into the glade (4.80).



4.79



4.80

“When I started watching films in the 1940s and 1950s, Indian cinematography was completely under the influence of Hollywood aesthetics, which mostly insisted on the ‘ideal light’ for the face, using heavy diffusion and strong backlight. I came to resent the complete disregard of the actual source of light and the clichéd use of backlight. Using backlight all the time is like using chili powder in whatever you cook.”

—Subrata Mitra, cinematographer

As our examples indicate, low-key lighting is often applied to somber, threatening, or mysterious scenes. It was common in horror films of the 1930s and *films noirs* (dark films) of the 1940s and 1950s. The low-key approach was revived in the 1980s in such films as *Blade Runner* and *Rumble Fish* and continued in the 1990s in film noirs like *Se7en* and *The Usual Suspects*.

When the actors change position, the director faces another forced choice: to alter the lighting or not. Surprisingly often, directors decide to maintain a constant lighting on the actors as they walk, even though that's quite unrealistic. By overlapping several different key-lighting units, the filmmaker can maintain a constant intensity on moving actors. As a result, distracting shadows and highlights do not flit across them (4.78, 4.79). Alternatively, the filmmaker may prefer to have the players move through shifting patches of light and shade (4.80).

In today's big-budget films, there are often three or more cameras covering scenes in large settings. To avoid rearranging dozens of lamps, the cinematographer will often opt for a soft, bright, top light covering the entire scene. Wherever the cameras are placed, the lighting units will not be visible on camera. In *The Wolfman* (2010), a nighttime forest scene had many lights nested in big translucent boxes hung on cranes above the location.

Digital tools permit lighting to be adjusted in postproduction. The cinematographer and the colorist can brighten a dark shot, add highlights or shadow, and enhance faces. The filmmakers' changes will tend to respect the three-point approach and motivate light sources and intensity in the traditional way.

Color We tend to think of film lighting as limited to two colors, the white of sunlight or the soft yellow of incandescent room lamps. In practice, filmmakers who choose to control lighting typically work with as purely white a light as they can. With filters placed in front of the light source, the filmmaker can color the onscreen illumination in any fashion.

There may be a realistic source in the scene to motivate colored light (4.81). Alternatively, colored light can also be unrealistic. In Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible*, Part 2, a blue light suddenly bursts upon the actor without any diegetic source. In the context of the scene, the abrupt lighting change expresses the character's terror and uncertainty (4.82, 4.83). Using lighting instead of acting to convey an emotion makes the scene more vivid and surprising.

Most film lighting is arranged as part of preparation for live-action filmmaking. But what if the settings and figures are created with a computer? Scanning a model or motion-capturing a figure does not record the light falling on it, and the resulting image is a neutral gray. Animators add simulated light to a scene using dedicated programs. Watch the credits for any special-effects-heavy film, and you will see long lists of names of people dealing with light and shade.

In *The Golden Compass*, the vicious combat between two armored polar bears was created entirely digitally. The fight takes place with a bright sun low in the sky, coming from off right. The icy clearing contains shadows of the surrounding crags (4.84). Simulated light is also used in digital animation. Pixar's *Cars* experimented with rendering the look of colored lights reflected on metal and glass (4.85).

We're used to ignoring the illumination of our surroundings, so film lighting is easy to take for granted. Yet the power of a shot is centrally controlled by light quality, direction, source, and color. The filmmaker can manipulate and combine these factors to shape the viewer's experience in a great many ways. No component of mise-en-scene is more important than what Sternberg called “the drama and adventure of light.”

Staging: Movement and Performance

When we think of a film director, we usually think of someone directing performers. The director is the person who says, “Stand over there,” “Walk toward the camera,” or “Show that you're holding back tears.” In such ways, the director controls a major component of mise-en-scene: the figures we see onscreen. Typically the figure is a person, but it could be an animal (Lassie the collie, Balthazar the donkey), a robot, an object (4.86), or even a pure shape (4.87). Mise-en-scene allows all these entities to express feelings and thoughts; it can also dynamize them to create kinetic patterns (4.88, 4.89).

Cinema gains great freedom from the fact that here expression and movement aren't restricted to human figures. The filmmaker can breathe life into two-dimensional characters, such as Shrek or Daffy Duck. Puppets may be manipulated frame by frame through the technique of *stop-action* or *stop-motion* (4.90). In science fiction and fantasy movies, robots and fabulous monsters created as models can be scanned and movement added via computer manipulation (1.30). Even if the figures are fantastical, however, the filmmaker is obliged to stage their actions and construct their performances.

Acting and Actuality Although abstract shapes and animated figures can become important in the mise-en-scene, the most familiar cases of figure expression and movement involve actors performing roles. An actor's performance consists of visual elements (appearance, gestures, facial expressions) and sound



4.81 Filtered lighting. An orange filter suggests that all the light in this scene from *The Green Room* comes from candles.



4.82



4.83

4.82–4.83 Lighting without a motivated source. In *Ivan the Terrible*, a character's fear registers on his face (4.82), and this is underscored by a blue light that bursts onto him (4.83).

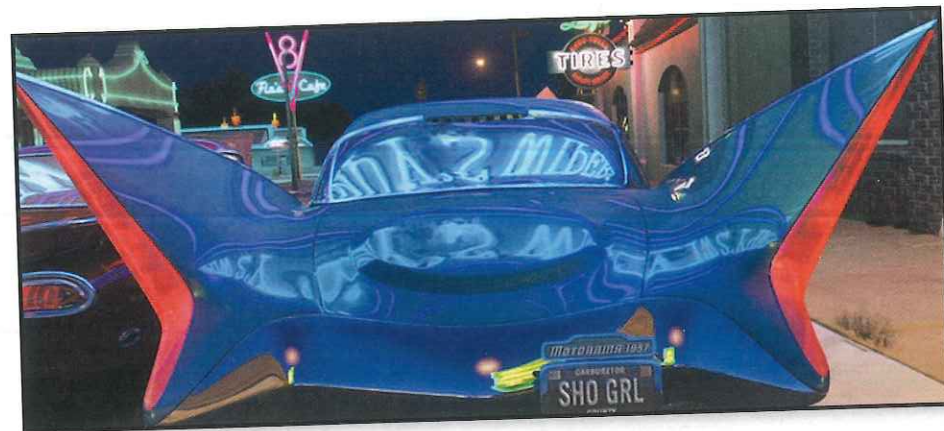


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Our entry on “The Cross” talks about a kind of staging largely forgotten in this era of rapid cutting and close framing. We discuss how scenic details can be integrated into staging in “You are my density.”

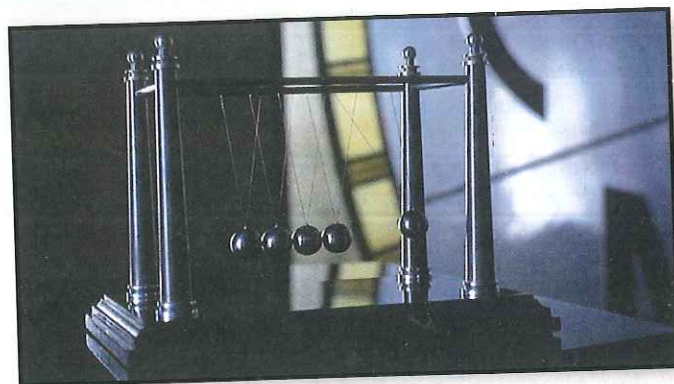


4.84

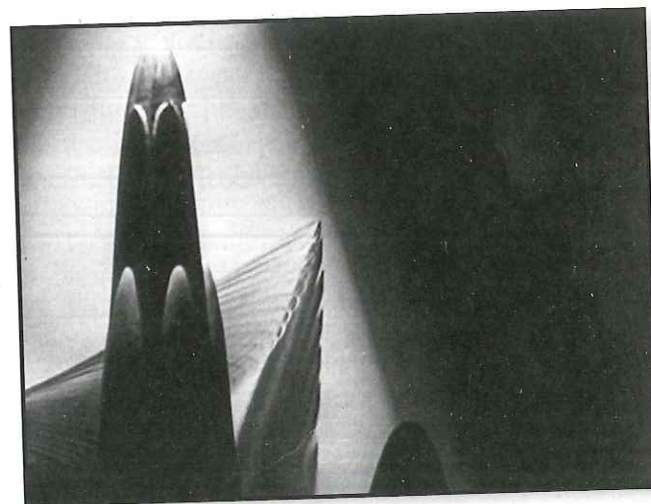


4.85

4.84–4.85 Digitally simulated lighting. In *The Golden Compass*, stark arctic sunshine from offscreen right falls as sidelight on the snow and the fighting bears (4.84). Simulated fill light was added to the onlookers and in areas of shading on the foreground bears. *Cars* puts on a virtuoso display of computer-simulated lighting, with neon signs reflecting in shiny surfaces as the cars cruise through their small-town street (4.85).



4.86



4.87

4.86–4.87 Controlling figure movement. In *The Hudsucker Proxy*, when the mailboy Norville proposes his new toy idea, the clicking balls on his boss's desktop inexplicably stop (4.86). The abstract film *Parabola* uses lighting and a pure background to emphasize shifting sculptural forms (4.87).



4.88



4.89

4.88–4.89 Stasis and violence in figure movement. In *Seven Samurai*, the samurai have won the battle with the bandits (4.88). Virtually the only movement in the frame is the driving rain, but the slouching postures of the men leaning on their spears express their tense weariness. By contrast, in *White Heat*, explosive movements and ferocious facial expressions present an image of psychotic rage as Cody Jarrett (James Cagney) learns of his mother's death (4.89).



4.90 Stop-motion animation. Ladislav Starevich's puppet film *The Mascot* includes a conversation between a devil and a thief, with subtle facial expressions and gestures created through animation.

(voice, effects). At times, of course, an actor may contribute only visual aspects, as in silent movies. In rare cases, an actor's performance may exist only on the sound track. In *A Letter to Three Wives*, Celeste Holm's character, Addie Ross, speaks a narration over the images but never appears on the screen.

Acting is often approached as a question of realism. But concepts of realistic acting have changed over film history. Today we may think that Hilary Swank in *Boys Don't Cry* and Heath Ledger and Jake Gyllenhaal in *Brokeback Mountain* give performances that are close to natural behavior. Yet in the early 1950s, the New York Actors Studio style, as exemplified by Marlon Brando's performances in *On the Waterfront* and *A Streetcar Named Desire*, was also thought to be extremely realistic. Fine though we may still find Brando's work, today his portrayals seem deliberate, heightened, and fairly unrealistic. Going back farther, post-World War II Italian Neorealist films were hailed as almost documentary depictions of Italian life (p. 478). But many of their performances now look as polished as those in Hollywood films. Major naturalistic performances of the 1970s, such as Robert De Niro's protagonist in *Taxi Driver*, seem quite stylized. Who can say what the acting in *Boys Don't Cry*, *Brokeback Mountain*, *Frozen River*, *Boyhood*, and other films will look like in a few decades?

There's another reason to be cautious in appealing to realism. Not all films try to achieve it. Since the performance an actor creates is part of the overall mise-en-scene, films contain a wide variety of acting styles. Instead of assuming that acting must be realistic, we should try to understand what kind of acting style the film is aiming at. If the film is best served by a nonrealistic performance, the skillful actor will strive to deliver that.

For example, comedy seldom strives for surface realism. In *All of Me* Steve Martin portrays a man whose body is suddenly inhabited on the right side by the soul of a woman who has just died. Martin used sudden changes of voice, along with acrobatic pantomime, to suggest a split body, half-male and half-female. The performance doesn't conform to realism, since the plot situation couldn't exist in the real world. In a comedy, however, Martin's performance was completely appropriate, and hilarious.

It isn't only comedies that encourage stylized performance. Fantasy films do, too, as we see in certain parts of *The Wizard of Oz*. (How would a real Wicked Witch behave?) In melodramas and action films from Hollywood, India, Hong Kong, and other traditions, exaggerated performances are a crucial source of the audience's pleasure. Viewers do not expect narrowly realistic acting from martial-arts stars Jet Li and Jackie Chan.

Finally, when we watch any fictional film, we are to some degree aware that the performances are the result of the actors' skills and decisions. (See "A Closer Look.") When we use the phrase "larger than life" to describe an effective performance, we

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How can we analyze film acting? We make some suggestions, especially about silent-film performance, in "Acting up." The entry "Faces behind Facebook" considers actors' performances in *The Social Network*.

“I get impatient with many Hollywood films because there's this assumption that meaning or emotion is contained in those few square inches of an actor's face and I just don't see it that way at all. I think there's a power in withholding information, revealing things gradually. Letting the audience discover things within the frame in time, in the way they stand.”

—Alison Maclean, director, *Crush*



A CLOSER LOOK

The Film Actor's Toolkit

We might think that the most important task facing an actor is speaking dialogue in a convincing and stirring way. Certainly, voice and delivery are very important in cinema, but considered in terms of mise-en-scene, the actor is always part of the overall visual design. Many film scenes contain little or no dialogue, but at every moment onscreen, the actor must be in character. The actor and director shape the performance pictorially.

Most of the time, film actors use their faces. This was most evident before movies had sound, and theorists of the silent film were full of praise for the subtle facial acting of Charlie Chaplin, Greta Garbo, and Lillian Gish. Since some happiness, fear, anger, and other facial expressions are understood easily across cultures, silent films could become popular around the world. Today, with mainstream films using many close-ups (see p. 46), actors' faces are hugely enlarged, and the performers must control their expressions minutely.

The most expressive parts of the face are the mouth, eyebrows, and eyes. All work together to signal how the character is responding to the dramatic situation. In *Jerry Maguire*, the accountant Dorothy Boyd accidentally meets Jerry at an airport baggage conveyor. She has a crush on him, partly because she admires the courageous mission statement he has issued to the sports agency that they work for. As he starts to back off from the statement, she eagerly quotes it from memory; Renée Zellweger's earnest smile and admiring gaze suggest that she takes the issues more seriously than Jerry does (4.91). This impression is confirmed when Jerry says, "Uh-huh" and studies her skeptically, his fixed smile signaling social politeness rather than genuine pride (4.92). This encounter sets up one premise of the film—that Jerry's idealistic impulses will need constant shoring up, for he might at any moment slip back into being "a shark in a suit."

The eyes hold a special place in film. In any scene, crucial story information is conveyed by the direction of a character's glance, the use of the eyelids, and the shape

of the eyebrows. One of Chaplin's most heart-rending moments comes in *City Lights*, when the blind flower girl, now sighted, suddenly realizes that he's her benefactor and we must find signs of hope in his eyes (4.93).

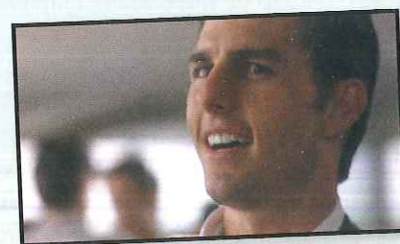
Normally, we don't stare intently at the people we talk with. We glance away about half the time to gather our thoughts, and we blink 10–12 times a minute. But actors must learn to look directly at each other, locking eyes and seldom blinking. If an actor glances away from the partner in the conversation, it suggests distraction or evasion. If an actor blinks, it suggests a reaction to what is happening in the scene (surprise, or anxiety). Actors playing forceful characters often stare fixedly. Anthony Hopkins said this of playing Hannibal Lecter: "If you don't blink you can keep the audience mesmerized." (See 8.7, 8.9.) In our *Jerry Maguire* scene, the protagonists watch each other fixedly. When Jerry closes his eyes in response to Dorothy's praise, it indicates his nervousness about confronting the issues that his mission statement raised.

Thanks to facial expressions—eyes plus eyebrows plus mouth—actors can develop their characterizations across the film. *The Social Network* centers on two college friends, Mark Zuckerberg and Eduardo Savarin, who collaborate to create Facebook. Throughout the film Jesse Eisenberg plays Mark with knitted brows, squinting eyes, and a grimly set mouth, all suggesting his fierce concentration and competitiveness (4.94). By contrast Andrew Garfield portrays the more trusting Eduardo with wide eyes, raised brows, and slightly bowed head (4.95). In their climactic confrontation, during a deposition for the suit that Eduardo has filed against Mark, Eduardo's facial behavior has changed to a direct, frowning challenge (4.96). This causes Mark to lower his head in embarrassment, an unusual reaction for the aggressive entrepreneur we've seen so far (4.97).

Actors act with their bodies as well as their faces. How a character walks, stands, or sits conveys a great deal



4.91



4.92

4.91–4.92 Facial expressiveness in close-ups. Perky and sincere, Dorothy pledges allegiance to Jerry Maguire's idealistic memo (4.91). Jerry smiles politely, but his sideways glance and raised brows suggest that he is a bit put off by her earnestness (4.92).



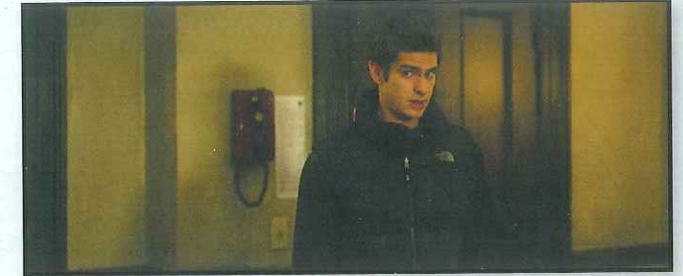
4.93 Acting with the eyes. In the climax of *City Lights*, Chaplin nervously twirls a flower, so we can't see the shape of his mouth. We must read yearning in his brows and rapt, dark gaze.



4.94



4.96



4.95



4.97

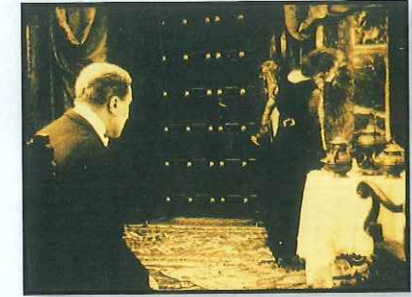
4.94–4.97 Character domination through actors' expressions. Early in *The Social Network*, Mark insists that Eduardo invest more in Facebook. The actors' expressions establish Mark as a tough, demanding leader and Eduardo as more submissive (4.94–4.95). During the climactic deposition, Eduardo fights back facially, and Mark submits (4.96–4.97).



4.98



4.99



4.100

4.98–4.100 Extroverted acting for extravagant suffering. In *Tigre Reale*, Menichelli's right hand seizes her hair, as if pulling her head back in agony; but her body still expresses defiance, thrust forward and standing firm as the left hand grips her waist (4.98). As Menichelli begins to feel shame, she retreats toward the fireplace, turning from us and slumping in a way that suggests regret (4.99). She keeps her back to the camera as she withdraws, now a pathetic figure (4.100).

about personality and attitude. In fact, during the 18th and 19th centuries, *attitude* was used to refer to the way a person stood. Stage acting gave early film a repertoire of postures that could express a character's state of mind. In the 1916 Italian film *Tigre Reale* (*The Royal Tigress*), the diva Pina Menichelli plays a countess with a shady past. At one point, she confesses this in a florid attitude that expresses noble suffering (4.98). While few actors today would resort to this stylized posture, early film audiences would have accepted it as vividly expressive, like a movement in dance. Menichelli plays the rest of the scene more quietly, but she still employs expressive attitudes (4.99, 4.100).

Actors who use their bodies in more naturalistic ways will still exercise firm control. *Margin Call* centers on a financial crisis in an investment firm. During a break in

the negotiations, three employees take a break by going onto the building's roof. Contrasting body behavior distinguishes the cautious Peter from the more imprudent Seth, both of whom differ from their heedless, almost suicidal boss Will (4.101, 4.102).

The gestures of Chaplin, Menichelli, and Quinto show that hands are important tools of the film actor. Hands are to the body what eyes are to the face: They focus our attention and evoke the character's thoughts and feelings. Actress Maureen O'Hara said of Henry Fonda, "All he had to do was wag his little finger and he could steal a scene from anybody." A good example can be seen in the doomsday thriller *Fail-Safe*. Henry Fonda plays the U.S. president, who has learned that an American warplane has been accidentally sent to bomb the Soviet Union. Fonda stands erect at the phone as he hears distressing



A CLOSER LOOK

Continued



4.101



4.102

4.101-4.102 Character contrast through body language. Peter, the analyst who has discovered the firm's overinvestment, follows Will to the edge of the rooftop but, looking down, is startled by the height. As Zachary Quinto plays the moment, Peter shies back and throws out one arm (4.101). Peter's colleague Seth (Penn Badgley) follows, and comes forward to peer over the roof edge (4.102). Throughout the plot, Seth is drawn to risk. Their superior, Will (Paul Bettany), is indifferent to danger, as he will show shortly when he climbs onto the railing far above the city.



4.103



4.104



4.105



4.106

news about the plane's progress, and he hangs up with his left hand (4.103-4.106). By keeping most of the shot still and bare, director Sidney Lumet has given Fonda's fingers the main role, letting them express the president's measured prudence but also suggesting the strain of the crisis.

4.103-4.106 Acting as finger exercise. In *Fail-Safe*, the president stands erect at the phone as he hears distressing news about the plane's progress, and he hangs up with his left hand (4.103). The president pauses and rubs his fingers together thoughtfully (4.104), then he taps into the intercom with his right hand (4.105). As he waits, for a brief moment his left fingers waggle anxiously, betraying his nervous concern (4.106).



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For more on how actors use their hands, see "Hand jive."
For more on eyes, see "Bette Davis eyelids."



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Sometimes critics concentrate on acting to the exclusion of a film's other qualities, as we complain in "Good actors spell good acting." On the conventions governing award-winning performances, see "Good actors spell good acting, 2: Oscar bait."

seem to be acknowledging the actor's craft. In analyzing a particular film, we usually must go beyond assumptions about realism and consider the purposes that the actor's craft serves. How appropriate, we can ask, is the performance to the context established by the genre, the film's narrative, and the overall mise-en-scene? A performance, realistic or not, should be examined according to its function in the film's overall formal design.

Acting: Functions and Motivation We can consider performance along two dimensions. A performance will be more or less *individualized*, and it will be

more or less *stylized*. Often we have both in mind when we think of a realistic performance: It creates a unique character, and it does not seem too exaggerated or too underplayed. Marlon Brando's portrayal of Don Vito Corleone in *The Godfather* is quite individualized. Brando gives the Godfather a complex psychology, a distinctive appearance and voice, and a string of facial expressions and gestures that make him significantly different from the standard image of a gang boss. As for stylization, Brando keeps Don Vito in the middle range. His performance is neither flat nor flamboyant. He isn't impassive, but he doesn't chew the scenery either.

Yet this middle range, which we often identify with realistic performance, isn't the only option. On the individuality scale, films may create broader, more anonymous *types*. Classical Hollywood narrative was built on ideologically stereotyped roles: the Irish cop on the beat, the black servant, the Jewish pawnbroker, the wisecracking waitress or showgirl. Through *typecasting*, actors were selected and directed to conform to what audiences expected. Often, however, skillful performers gave these conventions a freshness and vividness. The 1920s Soviet filmmakers adapted this principle, which they called *typage*. Here the actor was expected to portray a typical representative of a social class or historical movement (4.107, 4.108).

Whether more or less typed, the performance can also be located on a continuum of stylization. A long tradition of film acting strives for an expressive naturalness, with actors speaking their lines with slightly more clarity and emotion than we usually find in everyday life. The director and the performer may choose to enhance this streamlined naturalness by adding specific physical actions. Frequent gestures and movements by the actors add plausibility to the humor of Woody Allen's films (4.109).

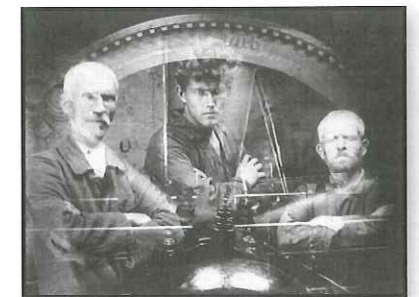
The actor is usually obliged to express emotion, but emotions come in many colors. Some are intense and burst out violently (4.110). Other emotions are masked, as when jealousy and suspicion are covered by excessive politeness (4.111). Sometimes emotional expression is broad and sweeping, almost operatic (4.112). And the same film may combine different degrees of emotional stylization. *Amadeus* contrasts a grotesque, giggling performance by Tom Hulce as Mozart with Murray Abraham's suave Salieri. The two acting styles sharpen the contrast between the older composer's decorous but dull music and the young man's offensive genius. In every film, the actor needs to blend the performance with the genre, the narrative, and the overall formal patterning.

Films like *Ivan the Terrible* and *Amadeus* create stylized performances through extroversion and exaggeration. The director can also explore the possibilities of very muted performances. Compared to normal practice, highly restrained acting can seem quite stylized. Robert Bresson is noted for such restrained performances. Using nonprofessional actors and drilling them in the details of the characters' physical actions, Bresson makes his actors nearly flat by conventional standards (4.113, 4.114). Although these performances may upset our expectations, we soon realize that such restraint focuses our attention on details of action we never notice in most movies.

Motion and Performance Capture Since the creation of digitally generated characters Jar Jar Binks in *Star Wars: Episode 1—The Phantom Menace* in 1999 and Gollum in *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* (2002), actors have had to learn new skills. In these early films, performers in special suits covered with dots were filmed digitally to form the basis for characters' movements. Soon CGI (computer-generated imagery) programs allowed more dense arrays of dots to capture smaller details of facial movement (4.112). The addition



4.107



4.108

4.107-4.108 A range of acting styles in the same film. The opening of Eisenstein's *Strike* presents the cartoonish cliché of the top-hatted capitalist (4.107), while in contrast the workers are presented as earnest and resolute (4.108).



4.109 Expressive naturalness in acting style. In *Hannah and Her Sisters*, Mia Farrow as Hannah, Diane Wiest as her sister Holly, and Carrie Fisher as their friend April set a table, chatting about the other guests as they do so.



4.110



4.111



4.112

4.110–4.112 Stylized acting and emotion. In *Winchester 73*, James Stewart's mild manner occasionally erupts into vengeful anger, revealing him as on the brink of psychosis (4.110). The exaggerated smiles and gestures in *Trouble in Paradise* are amusing because we know that the women, competing for the same man, are only pretending to be friends (4.111). Nikolai Cherkasov's dramatically raised arm and thrown-back head are appropriate to *Ivan the Terrible*, which creates a larger-than-life portrait of its hero (4.112).



4.113



4.114

4.113–4.114 Restrained acting. Playing the heroine of *Au Hasard Balthazar*, Anna Wiazemsky looks without expression at her would-be seducer, who wants her to get in his car (4.113). She glances downward, still without registering her thoughts, before sliding in (4.114).

of tiny cameras attached to the actors' heads permitted even subtler capture of expressions.

Now a distinction is made between *motion capture*, where the whole body is filmed, and *performance capture*, which concentrates on the face (4.115, 4.116). Motion capture can also be used on animals. Thanks to capture dots, ordinary horses can be transformed into fantastical creatures, as with *Avatar*'s six-legged horses. Animated films like *The Polar Express*, *The Adventures of Tintin*, and *Direhorses*. Animated films like *The Polar Express*, *The Adventures of Tintin*, and *Direhorses*. Animated films like *The Polar Express*, *The Adventures of Tintin*, and *Direhorses*. Animated films like *The Polar Express*, *The Adventures of Tintin*, and *Direhorses*.

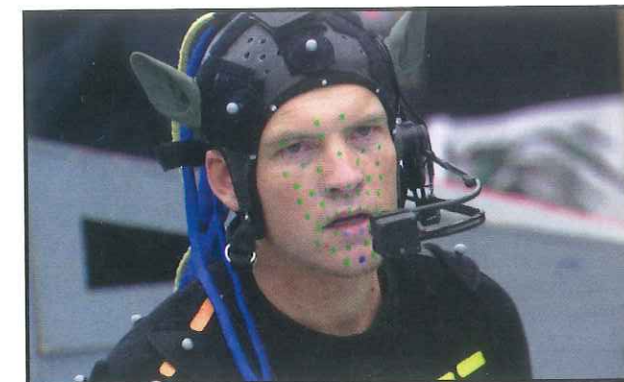
In predigital days, actors would play fantasy characters with heavy prosthetics and ample makeup. Motion capture and performance capture make it easier for the actor to concentrate on the performance. As James Cameron explained:

Actors have said to me, half jokingly but a little nervously, "Are you trying to replace actors?" And of course, the answer is no, we love actors. This whole thing is about acting. It's about creating these fantasy characters through the process of acting. What we're replacing is five hours in the makeup chair, having rubber glued all over your face.

Acting in the Context of Other Techniques By examining how an actor's performance functions within the overall film, we can also notice how acting blends with other film techniques. For instance, the actor is always a graphic element in the film, but some films underline this fact. In *The Cabinet of*



4.115



4.116

4.115–4.116 Motion and performance capture. In the high-tech studio used for *Avatar*, actors wear full-body motion-capture suits (4.115). For performance capture of Sam Worthington, green dots cover the most expressive areas of the face (4.116). A miniature camera, with rows of small LED bulbs trained on his face, adds extra light as it records his shifting expressions.



4.117



4.118

4.117–4.118 The actor as graphic element. In *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, Cesare's body echoes the tilted tree trunks (4.117), his arms and hands their branches and leaves. In *Breathless*, Jean Seberg's face is linked to a Renoir painting (4.118). Does she give an inexpressive performance or an enigmatic one?

Dr. Caligari, Conrad Veidt's dancelike portrayal of the somnambulist Cesare makes him blend in with the graphic elements of the setting (4.117). The graphic design of this scene in *Caligari* typifies the systematic distortion characteristic of German Expressionism (pp. 463–466).

In *Breathless*, director Jean-Luc Godard juxtaposes Jean Seberg's face with a print of a Renoir painting (4.118). We might think that Seberg is giving a bland performance here, for she simply poses in the frame and turns her head. Indeed, her acting in the entire film may seem fairly flat. Yet her face and demeanor are appropriate for her role, a capricious American woman unfathomable to her Parisian boyfriend.

A performance may be shaped by editing as well. Because a film is shot over a period of time, actors perform in bits, with separate shots recording different portions of a scene. This process can work to the filmmaker's advantage. If there are alternate takes of each shot, the editor can select the best gestures and expressions and create a composite performance better than any sustained performance is likely to be. By adding sound and other shots, the filmmaker can build up the performance still further. Sometimes a performance will be created almost wholly in postproduction. The director may simply tell an actor to stare offscreen, wide-eyed. If the next shot shows a hand with a gun, we are likely to think the actor is depicting fear effectively.



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When digital technology is involved, where does the actor's performance leave off and the special effects begin? We consider the question in "Motion-capturing an Oscar."



4.119



4.120

4.119–4.120 Performance in long shot and close-up. *The Spider's Stratagem*: In long shot, the actors' manner of walking helps characterize them (4.119). The stiff, upright way in which the heroine holds her parasol is one of the main facets of Alida Valli's performance. In a closer framing, her performance displays detailed eye and lip movements (4.120).

Camera techniques also create a controlling context for acting. Film acting, as you know, differs from theatrical acting. In a theater, we are usually at a considerable distance from the actor on the stage. We certainly can never get as close to the theater actor as the camera can put us in a film. For that reason, we're inclined to think that the film actor must always underplay—that is, act in a more restrained fashion than stage acting would require. But recall that the camera can be at *any* distance from the figure. Filmed from very far away, the actor is a dot on the screen—much smaller than an actor on stage seen from the back of the balcony. Filmed from very close, the actor's tiniest eye movement may be revealed.

Thus the film actor must behave differently than the stage actor does, but not always by being more restrained. Rather, she or he must be able to *adjust to each type of camera distance*. If the actor is far from the camera, he or she may have to gesture broadly or move around to be seen as acting at all. But if the camera and actor are inches apart, a twitch of a mouth muscle will come across clearly. Between these extremes, there is a whole range of adjustments to be made.

Often a shot will concentrate on either the actor's facial expression or on bodily movement. In most close shots, the face will be emphasized, and so the actor will have to control eyes, brows, and mouth quite precisely. But if the camera is farther back, or the actor is turned away from us, gestures and body language become the center of attention. In all, both the staging of the action and the camera's distance from the action control how we understand the performances (4.119, 4.120).

Matters of context are particularly important when the performers are not actors, or even human beings. Framing, editing, and other film techniques can make trained animals give appropriate performances. Jonesy, the cat in *Aliens*, seems threatening because his hissing movement has been emphasized by lighting, framing, editing, and the sound track (4.121).

As with every element of a film, acting offers an unlimited range of creative choices. It cannot be judged on a universal scale outside the context of the entire film's form.

Putting It All Together: Mise-en-Scene in Space and Time

Back in Chapter 2, we argued that viewers try to blend what they see and hear into a larger pattern (p. 54). This process starts at the level of the shot, when we have to assemble information into a coherent space and time. And creating that coherence requires that the filmmaker guide us to certain areas of the frame.

How do we know that viewers scan the frame for important information? The psychologist Tim Smith asked viewers to wear lightweight glasses that could track their eye movements and then showed them a scene from *There Will Be Blood*. The eye movements were recorded by computers and mapped onto the film sequence, so Smith could study how the viewers' attention shifted within the scene. There was remarkable agreement among the subjects about where to look at any moment. The primary points of attention were, as we might expect, items crucial to building up a story: faces and hand gestures (4.122, 4.123). The characters' dialogue was important, too; the scan-paths revealed that people tend to look at the person speaking in the shot.

Before viewers can follow the story, recognize the emotional tenor of the scene, respond with their own emotions, and reflect on possible meanings, they must notice certain things in the frame. In setting up a shot, the filmmaker makes some things more salient than others. We noticed this happening when we examined how Tarantino nudged us to watch Colonel Landa in the scene from *Inglourious Basterds*. Thinking like a filmmaker means, to a large extent, finding ways to guide the viewer's eye. In other words, directors direct attention.



4.121 Editing to create a performance. In *Aliens*, editing makes it seem that Jonesy is reacting angrily to something in the scene.



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For more on how shot scale can affect performance, see, "Where did the two-shot go? Here."



4.122



4.123

4.122–4.123 Scanning the shot. Tim Smith and his colleagues tracked several subjects' eye movements during a single shot of *There Will Be Blood*. Here is one frame from the sequence, as the characters examine a map (4.122). Smith's "peekthrough heatmap" graphically indicates the areas of interest for the eight viewers watching at that moment (4.123). The black surround represents areas not watched by anyone. Areas of attention are lit up, and the hotter the color, the more viewers are looking at that spot. At this instant, most viewers were concentrating on Sunday's face and hand, with two viewers looking at the man facing front behind him. As filmmakers might expect, faces, hands, and dialogue have commanded viewers' attention.



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For more on Tim Smith's eye-tracking experiments, see "Watching you watch *There Will Be Blood*."

CREATIVE DECISIONS

Mise-en-Scene in a Sequence from *L'Avventura*

To get a sense of the filmmaker's creative options in guiding our eye, let's look at another sequence. In Michelangelo Antonioni's *L'Avventura*, Sandro and Claudia are searching for Anna, who has mysteriously vanished. Anna is Claudia's friend and Sandro's lover, but during their search, they've begun to drift from their goal of finding her. They've also begun a love affair. In the town of Noto, they stand on a church rooftop near the bells, and Sandro says he regrets giving up architectural design. Claudia is encouraging him to return to his profession when he suddenly asks her to marry him.

She's startled and confused, and Sandro comes toward her. She is turned away from us. At first, only Sandro's expression is visible as he reacts grimly to her plea, "Why can't things be simpler?" (4.124). Claudia twists her arms around the bell rope, then turns away from him, toward us, grasping the rope and fluttering her hand. Now we can see that she's quite distraught. Sandro, a bit uneasy, turns away as she says anxiously, "I'd like to see things clearly" (4.125).

Brief though it is, this exchange shows how the tools of mise-en-scene—setting, costume, lighting, performance, and staging—can work together smoothly. We've considered them separately in order to examine the contribution each one makes, but in any shot, they mesh. They unfold on the screen in space and time, fulfilling several functions.

Most basically, the filmmaker has to guide the audience's attention to the important areas of the image. The filmmaker also wants to build up our interest by

“The audience is only going to look at the most overriding thing in the frame. You must take charge of and direct their attention. It's also the principle of magic: what is the single important thing? Make it easy for them to see it, and you're doing your job.”

—David Mamet, director



4.124



4.125

4.124–4.125 Frontality gets attention. In *L'Avventura*, first Claudia has her back to the camera (4.124), and then Sandro does (4.125). Each shift is timed to show us a crucial facial reaction.

closer. The rope slices across the bottom third of the frame, separating the couple (overlap again). Sandro himself overlaps the railing, which in turn overlaps the sky and the town beyond. We get a sense of distinct planes of space, layers lying closer to or farther from us. Costume, lighting, setting, and figure placement create this sense of a three-dimensional arena for the action.

Antonioni has used mise-en-scene to emphasize his characters and their interaction. But that interaction unfolds in time, and it gives him an opportunity to guide our attention while building up suspense and expressing emotion. Claudia is turned away from us when Sandro presses her to marry him, and the rope is taut between them (4.124). How will she respond?

Antonioni starts by giving Claudia a bit of business. She twists the rope around her arms and slips it over her back. This could be a hint that she's drawn to Sandro's proposal. At the same time, she hesitates. For as soon as he presses her, she turns away from him (4.125).

We know that faces give us access to characters' thoughts and emotions. Another filmmaker might have had Claudia already facing us when Sandro asked, so we'd see her response immediately. Antonioni instead makes things uncertain for a moment. He conceals Claudia's reaction and then lets her turn toward us. To make sure that we watch her and not Sandro at this moment, Antonioni has him turn away when she gestures and speaks ("I'd like to see things clearly"). Our attention is riveted on Claudia.

Soon enough, Sandro turns back toward the camera, so we can see his reaction, but already Claudia's anxiety has flashed out at us. Her mixed response to Sandro's proposal—attraction (sliding under the bell rope) and uncertainty (turning away tensely)—has been presented to us concretely.

This is only one moment in a complex scene, but it shows how various elements of mise-en-scene can cooperate to create a specific effect: the delayed

arousing curiosity and suspense. And the filmmaker tries to add expressive qualities, giving the shot an emotional coloration. Mise-en-scene helps the filmmaker achieve all these purposes.

How did Antonioni guide our attention in the Claudia–Sandro exchange? First, we're watching the figures, not the railing behind them. Based on the story so far, we expect Sandro and Claudia to be the objects of interest. At other points in the film, Antonioni makes them tiny figures in massive urban or seaside landscapes. Here, however, his mise-en-scene keeps their intimate interchange foremost in our minds.

Consider the first image merely as a two-dimensional picture. Both Sandro and Claudia stand out against the pale sky and the darker railing. They're also mostly curved shapes—heads and shoulders—and so they contrast with the geometrical regularity of the balcony. In the first frame, light strikes Sandro's face and suit from the right, picking him out against the rails. His dark hair is well positioned to make his head stand out against the sky. Claudia, a blonde, stands out against the railing and sky less vividly, but her polka-dot blouse creates a distinctive pattern. And considered only as a picture, the shot roughly balances the two figures, Sandro in the left half and Claudia in the right.

It's hard to think of the shot as simply two-dimensional, though. We instinctively see it as portraying a space that we could move around in. Claudia seems closer to us because her body masks things farther away, a spatial cue called *overlap*. She's also somewhat larger in the frame than Sandro, which reinforces our sense that she's

revelation of a character's emotion. That revelation depended on the director's choices about what to show us at particular points. Once we've been guided to notice certain things, we can build up larger meanings and particular feelings. Let's now look at some specific options for using mise-en-scene to shape our sense of a film's space and time.

Space

Screen Space In many respects, a film shot resembles a painting. It presents a flat array of colors and shapes. Before we even start to understand the image as a three-dimensional space, mise-en-scene offers many cues for guiding our attention and emphasizing elements in the frame.

Take something as simple as balancing the shot. Filmmakers often try to distribute various points of interest evenly around the frame. They assume that viewers will concentrate more on the upper half of the frame, probably because that's where we tend to find characters' faces. Since the film frame is a horizontal rectangle, the director usually tries to balance the right and left halves. The extreme type of such balancing is *bilateral symmetry*. In the battle scene in *Life on a String*, Chen Kaige stages one shot symmetrically (4.126).

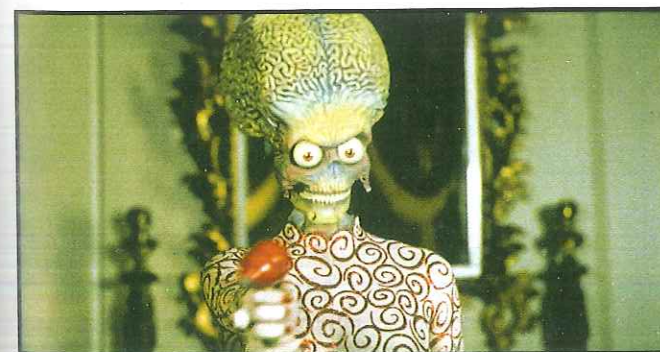
More common than such near-perfect symmetry is a loose balancing of the shot's left and right regions. The simplest way to achieve compositional balance is to center the frame on the human body. Filmmakers often place a single figure at the center of the frame and minimize distracting elements at the sides, as in 4.127. Many of our earlier illustrations display this flexible balance. Other shots may counterweight two or more elements, encouraging our eye to move back and forth, as in 4.128 and our *L'Avventura* dialogue (4.124, 4.125).

Balanced composition is the norm, but unbalanced shots can also create strong effects. In *Bicycle Thieves*, the composition emphasizes the father's new job by massing most of the figures on the right (4.129). A more drastic example occurs in Michelangelo Antonioni's *Il Grido* (4.130), where two strong elements, the hero and a tree trunk, are grouped on the right side of the shot. The shot creates a powerful urge for the audience to see the woman's hidden face.

Sometimes the filmmaker will leave the shots a little unbalanced, in order to prime our expectation that something will change position in the frame. The cinema of



4.126 Symmetrical framing. A limited palette emphasizes this symmetrical composition in *Life on a String*.



4.127



4.128

4.127–4.128 Balancing the frame. *Mars Attacks!*: centering a single character (4.127) and balancing two (4.128).

4.129–4.130 Deliberately unbalanced composition. In *Bicycle Thieves*, the men on the right don't balance the son (4.129), but he seems even more vulnerable by being such an ineffective visual counterweight. In *Il Grido*, instead of balancing the couple, the composition centers the man (4.130). If there were no tree in the frame, the shot would still be somewhat weighted to the right, but the unexpected vertical of the trunk makes that side even heavier.



4.129



4.130



4.131



4.132



4.133



4.134

4.131–4.134 Balancing and rebalancing. From quite early in cinema history, filmmakers used unbalanced compositions to prepare the viewer for new narrative developments. In Yevgenii Bauer's *The Dying Swan* (1916), the young ballerina receives a tiara from an admirer (4.131). She studies herself in a mirror, in a composition that a tiara from an admirer (4.131). She studies herself in a mirror, in a composition that a tiara from an admirer (4.131). She studies herself in a mirror, in a composition that a tiara from an admirer (4.131). As the ballerina lowers her arm, the door opens and her father appears (4.133). He comes to the front area and balances the composition (4.134).



4.135 Contrast guides attention. In V. I. Pudovkin's *Mother*, the spectator concentrates on the man's face rather than on the darkness surrounding it.

the 1910s offers intriguing examples. Very often a doorway in the back of the set allowed the director to show that new characters were entering the scene, but then figures closer to the camera had to be rearranged to permit a clear entrance. The result was a subtle unbalancing and rebalancing of the composition (4.131–4.134). In Chapter 6, we'll see how cutting can balance two shots containing relatively unbalanced compositions.

The filmmaker can guide our attention by use of another time-tested strategy, the principle of contrast. Our eyes are biased toward registering differences and changes. In most black-and-white films, light costumes or brightly lit faces stand out while darker areas tend to recede (4.135). If there are several light shapes in the frame, we'll tend to look from one to the other. But if the background is light, black elements will become prominent, as Sandro's hair does in our *L'Avventura* scene (4.124). The same principles work for color. A bright costume or bit of setting shown against a more subdued setting is likely to draw the eye (4.136). Another pertinent principle is that when lightness values are equal, warm colors in the red-orange-yellow range tend to attract attention, while cool colors like purple and green are less prominent (4.137).



4.136

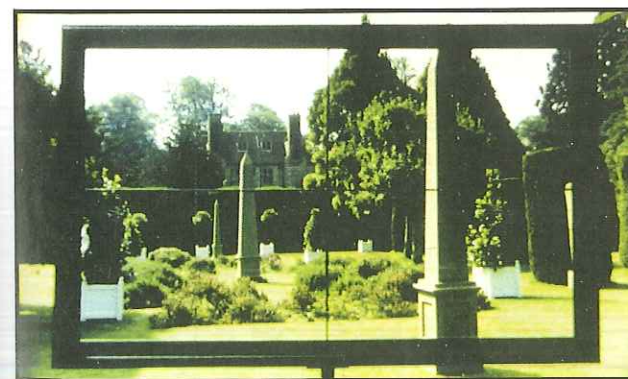


4.137

4.136–4.137 Bright and warm colors get attention. In Jiří Menzel's *Larks on a String*, a propaganda display about happy workers stands out against the earthy grays and blacks of the junkyard (4.136). In Yılmaz Güney's *Yol*, the setting and the characters' outfits are warm in hue, but the hot pink vest of the man in the central middle ground helps make him the primary object of attention (4.137).

Color contrasts don't have to be huge, because we're sensitive to small differences. What painters call a *limited palette* involves a few colors in the same range, as in our earlier example from Fellini's *Casanova* (4.40). Peter Greenaway's *The Draughtsman's Contract* employs a limited palette from the cooler end of the spectrum (4.138). An extreme case of the principle is sometimes called **monochromatic color design**. Here the filmmaker emphasizes a single color, varying it only in purity or lightness. We've already seen an example of monochromatic mise-en-scene in the white décor and costumes of *THX 1138* (4.41). In a monochromatic design, even a fleck of a contrasting color will catch the viewer's attention (4.139).

Film has one resource that painting lacks. Our tendency to notice visual differences is strongly aroused when the image includes *movement*. In the *L'Avventura* scene, the turning of Claudia's head became a major event, but we are sensitive to far smaller motions in the frame. Normally, for instance, we ignore the movement of scratches and dust on a film. But in David Rimmer's *Watching for the Queen*, in which the first image is an absolutely static photograph (4.140), the jumping bits of dust on the film draw our attention. In 4.141, from Yasujiro Ozu's *Record of a*



4.138



4.139

4.138–4.139 Limited color palettes. *The Draughtsman's Contract* uses a limited palette of green, black, and white (4.138). The color design of *Aliens* is dominated by gray and blue metallic tones, so even a dingy yellow can mark the stiltlike loader as an important prop in the narrative (4.139).



4.140



4.141

4.140–4.141 Minimal motion. Watching for the Queen emphasizes scratches and dust (4.140), while flapping paper catches our attention in *Record of a Tenement Gentleman* (4.141).



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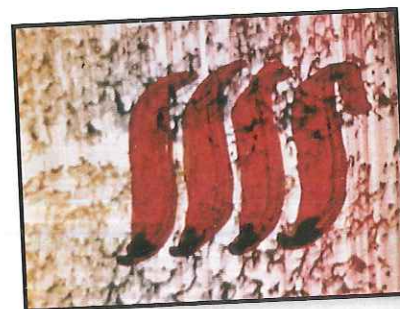
Whether you see *Coraline* in a 3D or a 2D version, it has some fascinating use of depth cues to differentiate the heroine's real life and the alternative life she finds behind a door in her room. We take a look at these in "Coraline, cornered."



4.142 Centered framing. Central position emphasizes a background figure in *Young Mr. Lincoln*.



4.143 Volume in scene space. Shading and shape suggest volume in Dreyer's *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc*.



4.144 Flattened space. Norman McLaren's *Begone, Dull Care*, provides no depth cues for volume.

Tenement Gentleman, many items compete for our attention. But the moment that a scrap of newspaper flaps in the wind, it immediately attracts the eye because it is the only motion in the frame.

When several moving elements appear on the screen, we are likely to shift our attention among them, according to other cues or depending on our expectations about which one is most important for the narrative. In **4.142**, from John Ford's *Young Mr. Lincoln*, Lincoln is moving much less than the dancers we see in front of him. Yet as the film's major character he is framed centrally, and the dancers pass rapidly through the frame. As a result, we are likely to concentrate on his gestures and facial expressions, however slight they might be compared to the energetic action in the foreground.

Scene Space Looking at a film image as a two-dimensional picture helps us appreciate the artistry of filmmakers, but it requires some effort. We find it easier to immediately see the shapes on the screen as presenting a three-dimensional area, like the spaces we live in. The elements of the image that create this impression are called *depth cues*.

Depth cues are what enabled us to understand the encounter of Sandro and Claudia as taking place in a realistic space, with layers and volumes. We develop our understanding of depth cues from our experience of real locales and from our earlier experience with pictorial media. In cinema, depth cues are provided by lighting, setting, costumes, and staging—that is, by all the aspects of mise-en-scene.

Depth cues suggest that a space has both *volume* and several distinct *planes*. When we speak of an object as having volume, we mean that it is solid and occupies a three-dimensional area. A film suggests volume by shape, shading, and movement. In **4.118** and **4.143**, we don't see the actors as flat cutouts, like paper dolls. The shapes of those heads and shoulders suggest solid people. The attached shadows on the faces suggest the curves and recesses of the actors' features and give a modeling effect. We assume that if Jean Seberg in **4.118** turned her head, we would see a profile. Thus we use our knowledge of objects in the world to discern volume in filmic space.

An abstract film, because it can use shapes that are not familiar objects, can create compositions without a sense of volume. The shapes in **4.144** give us no depth cues for volume—they are unshaded, do not have a recognizable shape, and do not move in such a way as to reveal new views that suggest roundness.

Depth cues also pick out *planes* within the image. Planes are described according to how close to or far away from the camera they are: foreground, middle ground, background.

Only a completely blank screen has a single plane. Whenever a shape, even an abstract one, appears, we will perceive it as being in front of a background. In **4.144**, the four red S shapes are actually painted right on the frame surface, as is the

lighter, textured area. Yet the textured area seems to lie behind the four shapes. The space here has only two planes, as in decorated wallpaper. This example, like our *L'Avventura* scene, suggests that one of the most basic depth cues is **overlap**. The curling S shapes have edges that overlap the background plane, block our vision of it, and thus seem to be closer to us.

Through overlap, a great many planes can be defined. In **4.62**, from Jean-Luc Godard's *La Chinoise*, three distinct planes are displayed: the background of fashion cutouts, the woman's face that overlaps that background, and her hand, which overlaps her lower face. In the three-point lighting approach, edge lighting accentuates the overlap of planes by emphasizing the contour of the object, thus sharply distinguishing it from the background. (See again **4.65**, **4.71**, and **4.72**.)

Color differences also create overlapping planes. Because cool or pale colors tend to recede, filmmakers commonly use them for background planes such as setting. Similarly, because warm or saturated colors tend to come forward, such hues are often employed for costumes or other foreground elements (**4.145**). (See also **4.30** and **4.38**.) In *One Froggy Evening* (**4.146**), the luminous yellow of the umbrella and the frog's brilliant green skin make him stand out against the darker red curtain and the earth tones of the stage floor.

Because of the eye's sensitivity to differences, even quite muted color contrasts can suggest three-dimensional space. In *L'Argent* (**4.21–4.23**), Robert Bresson uses a limited, cool palette and relatively flat lighting. Yet the compositions pick out several planes by means of overlapping slightly different masses of black, tan, and light blue. Our shot from *Casanova* (**4.40**) articulates planes by means of slightly differing shades of red. By contrast, a filmmaker may want to minimize color differences and depth cues in order to create a flatter, more abstract composition (**4.147**).

In cinema, *movement* is one of the most important depth cues, since it strongly suggests both planes and volumes (**4.142**). **Aerial perspective**, or the hazing of more distant planes, is yet another depth cue. Typically, our eyes and brain assume that sharper outlines, clearer textures, and purer colors belong to foreground elements. In landscape shots, the blurring and graying of distant planes can be caused by natural atmospheric haze (**4.148**). Even when such haze is a minor factor, our vision typically assigns strong color contrasts to the foreground, as in the *Sambizanga* shot (**4.145**). In addition, very often lighting is manipulated in conjunction with lens focus to blur the background planes (**4.149**).

In **4.150**, the mise-en-scene provides several depth cues: overlap of edges, cast shadows, and **size diminution**. That is, figures and objects farther away from us are seen to get proportionally smaller. This reinforces our sense of seeing a deep space with considerable distances between the planes.

The same illustration dramatically displays *linear perspective*. We will consider perspective relations in more detail in the next chapter, since they derive as much from properties of the camera lens as they do from mise-en-scene. For now, we can simply note that a strong impression of depth emerges when parallel lines converge at a distant vanishing point. *Central perspective* is exemplified in **4.138** from *The Draughtsman's Contract*. *Off-center linear perspective* is illustrated in **4.150**, in which the vanishing point is not the geometrical center of the frame.

All of these depth cues are *monocular*, which means that the illusion of depth requires input from only one eye. *Stereopsis* is a binocular depth cue. It results from the fact that our two eyes see the world from slightly different angles. In two-dimensional films, there is a single lens and thus no stereoptic effect. Three-dimensional

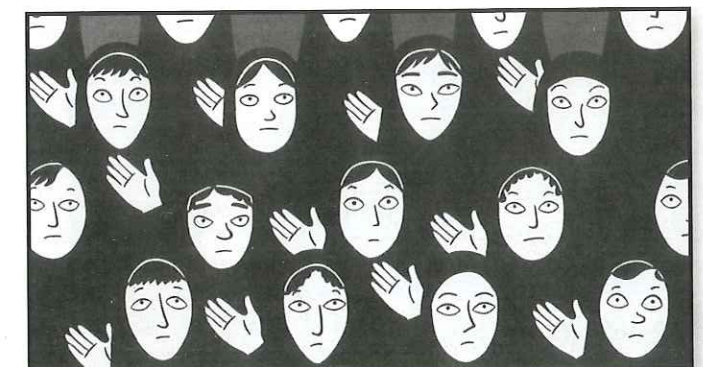


4.145



4.146

4.145–4.146 Warm color for the foreground. In Sarah Maldoror's *Sambizanga*, the heroine's dress has very warm and fairly saturated colors, making it stand out distinctly against the pale background (**4.145**). Brilliant colors emphasize extreme depth in Chuck Jones's *One Froggy Evening* (**4.146**).



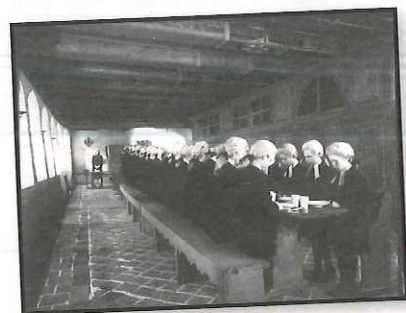
4.147 Flattening space for expressive effect. Marjane Satrapi and Vincent Paronnaud's animated film *Persepolis* doesn't differentiate the schoolgirls' costumes by edge lighting or color differences. The result is a mass of black. Combined with the students' repetitive gestures, the image suggests that the school system demands conformity.



4.148 Aerial perspective through atmospheric effects. Fog emphasizes the distance between the foreground and background trees in Güney's *The Wall*.



4.149 Aerial perspective through lighting. In *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, aerial perspective is artificially created by diffused lighting of the background and a lack of clear focus behind the officer in the foreground.



4.150 Size diminution. Steep size diminution emphasizes depth in Straub and Huillet's *The Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach*.

cinema uses two lenses, imitating the separation of our eyes. The glasses used for viewing 3D films direct different visual information to each eye, creating a stronger illusion of depth than monocular depth cues can render. Stereopsis is a depth cue rendered by cinematography rather than mise-en-scene, so we'll talk about it more in the next chapter.

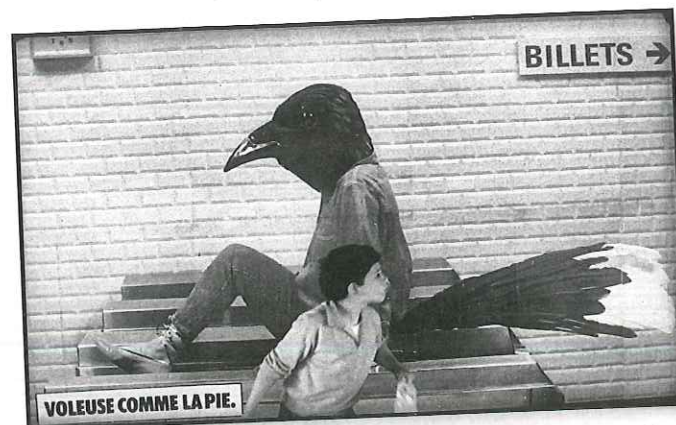
In many of the examples already given, you may have noticed that mise-en-scene serves not simply to direct our attention to foreground elements but rather to create a dynamic relation between foreground and background. In 4.62, for instance, Godard keeps our attention on the whole composition by using prominent backgrounds. Here the pictures behind the actress's head lead us to scan the various small shapes quickly.

The *La Chinoise* shot is a **shallow-space** composition. In such shots, the mise-en-scene suggests comparatively little depth, and the closest and most distant planes seem only slightly separated. The opposite tendency is **deep-space** composition, in which a significant distance seems to separate planes. Our example from *The Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach* (4.150) exemplifies deep-space mise-en-scene. Often a director creates a deep-space composition by making the foreground plane quite large and the background plane quite distant (4.151).

Shallow and deep mise-en-scene are relative concepts. Most compositions present a moderately deep space, falling between the extremes we've just considered. Sometimes a filmmaker manipulates depth cues to make a space appear deeper or shallower than it really is—creating an optical illusion (4.152).



4.151 Deep-space composition. Several scenes of Wajda's *Ashes and Diamonds* create large foregrounds and distant background planes.



4.152 Playing with depth cues. Leos Carax creates an optical illusion in *Boy Meets Girl* by making the painted advertisement seem to thrust out into the space inhabited by the boy.

At this point, you might want to return to shots illustrated earlier in this chapter. You'll notice that these images use depth cues of overlap, movement, cast shadows, aerial perspective, size diminution, and linear perspective to create distinctive foreground/background relations.

CREATIVE DECISIONS

Mise-en-Scene in Two Shots from *Day of Wrath*

The fact that our vision is sensitive to differences allows filmmakers to guide our understanding of the mise-en-scene. All the cues to story space interact with one another, working to emphasize narrative elements, direct our attention, and set up dynamic relations among areas of screen space. We can see this interaction clearly in two shots from Carl Dreyer's *Day of Wrath*.

In the first shot, the heroine, Anne, is standing before a grillwork panel (4.153). She isn't speaking, but since she is a major character in the film, the narrative already directs us to her. Setting, lighting, costume, and figure expression create pictorial cues that confirm our expectations. The setting yields a pattern of horizontal and vertical lines that intersect in the delicate curves of Anne's face and shoulders. The lighting yields a patch of brightness on the right half of the frame and a patch of darkness on the left, creating pictorial balance. Anne is the meeting point of these two areas. Her face is modeled by the relatively strong key lighting from the right, a little top lighting on her hair, and relatively little fill light. Anne's black dress punctuated by a white collar and her black cap edged with white further emphasize her face.

The shot is comparatively shallow, displaying two major planes with little distance between them. The background sets off the most important element, Anne. The rigid geometrical grid in the rear makes Anne's slightly sad face the most expressive element in the frame, thus encouraging our eye to pause there. In addition, the composition divides the screen space horizontally, with the grid pattern running across the top half and the dark, severe vertical of Anne's dress dominating the lower half. As is common, the upper zone is the stronger because the character's head and shoulders occupy it. Anne's figure is positioned slightly off center, but with her face turned to compensate for the vacant area on the right. (Imagine how unbalanced the shot would look if she were turned to face us squarely and the same amount of space were left empty on the right.) Thus compositional balance reinforces the shot's emphasis on Anne's expression. Without using movement, Dreyer has channeled our attention by means of lines and shapes, lights and darks, and the foreground and background relations in the mise-en-scene.

In the second example, also from *Day of Wrath*, Dreyer coaxes our attention into a to-and-fro movement (4.154). Again, the plot guides us, since the characters and the cart are crucial narrative elements. Sound helps, too, since Martin is at the moment explaining to Anne that the wood in the cart will fuel the witch-burning. But mise-en-scene also plays a role. Size diminution and cast shadows establish basic foreground/background relations, with Anne and Martin on the front plane and the cart of wood in the background. The space is comparatively deep (though the foreground is not as exaggeratedly close as that in *Ashes and Diamonds*, 4.151). The prominence of the couple and the cart is reinforced by line, shape, and lighting contrasts. The figures are defined by hard edges and by dark costumes within the predominantly bright setting. Unlike most shots, this puts the human figures in the lower half of the frame, which gives that zone an unusual importance. The composition thus creates a vertical balance, counterweighting the cart with the couple. Were Tim Smith to test his viewers' scanning on this shot, we'd expect eye movements glancing up and down between the two objects of our attention.



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For our thoughts on some digital 3D films, see "A turning point in digital projection?"; "Bwana Beowulf"; "Do not forget to return your 3D glasses"; and "Adieu au language: 2 + 2 × 3D."



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For a variety of staging options, in both shallow space and depth, see "Gradations of emphasis, starring Glenn Ford" and "How to watch *Fantômas*, and why." "Dial M for Murder: Hitchcock frets not his narrow room" analyzes how Hitchcock uses 3D to stage nearly all of a film in one apartment.



4.153



4.154

4.153–4.154 Concentrating our attention. *Day of Wrath*: Highlighting a single figure (4.153) and dividing attention between foreground and background (4.154).



4.155



4.156

4.155–4.156 Color and composition. An apparently simple shot from *An Autumn Afternoon* employs several depth cues (4.155) and harks back to the striped smokestacks seen at the beginning (4.156).



4.157 Movement cues. Slow, quiet movements of the actor in *Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* enable the audience to detect even slight changes.

Similar processes are at work in color films. In one shot of Yasujiro Ozu's *An Autumn Afternoon* (4.155), our attention is concentrated on the bride in the center foreground. Many depth cues are at work. Overlap locates the two figures in two foreground planes, setting them against a series of more distant planes. Aerial perspective makes the foliage outside somewhat out of focus. Movement creates depth when the bride lowers her head. Perspective diminution makes the more distant objects smaller. The woman's face and the bright silver, red, and gold bridal costume stand out strikingly against the muted colors of the background planes. Moreover, the colors lead us to recall a red-and-silver motif that appeared in the first shot of the film (4.156).

In looking at a shot, we're more aware of *what* we see than *how* we see it. To think like a filmmaker, though, we need to reflect on that *how*. The filmmaker arranges shapes and colors on the two-dimensional screen. He or she also controls depth cues that suggest three dimensions. The filmmaker uses those patterns to activate what is most important at each moment. Mise-en-scene structures space in ways that guide, and sometimes dazzle, our eyes.

Time

Cinema is an art of time as well as space. So we shouldn't be surprised to find that many of our examples of two-dimensional composition and three-dimensional scenic space have unfolded over time. The director's control over mise-en-scene governs not only *what* we see but *when* we see it and for how long. In our *L'Avventura* scene between Sandro and Claudia on the rooftop (4.124, 4.125), the timing of the characters' movements—Sandro turning away just as Claudia turns toward us—contributes to the effect of a sudden, sharp revelation of her anxiety.

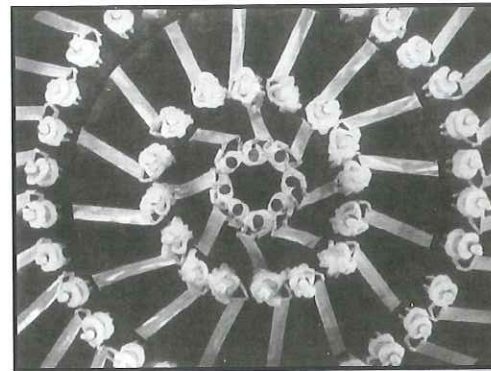
The director shapes the speed and direction of movement within the shot. Since our eyes are attuned to noticing changes, we can pick up the slightest cues. In 4.157, from Chantal Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles*, the protagonist simply peels potatoes. This feminist film traces, in painstaking detail, the everyday routines of a Belgian housewife. The composition of this shot strongly centers Jeanne, and no competing movements distract us from her steady and efficient preparation of a meal. The same rhythm is carried throughout the film, so that when she does start to vary her habits, we are prepared to notice even the slight errors she makes under emotional pressure.

A far busier shot is 4.158, from Busby Berkeley's *42nd Street*. This overhead view presents strongly opposed movements. The central and outer rings of dancers circle in one direction, while the second ring turns in a contrary direction. The dancers also swing strips of shiny cloth back and forth. The result is a partially abstract composition, but it's easy to grasp because the movement of the wheels within wheels has a geometrical clarity.

The dancers in *42nd Street* are synchronized to a considerable degree, but 4.159, from Jacques Tati's *Play Time*, contains movements of differing speeds, with different visual accents. Moreover, they occur on different planes and follow contrasting trajectories. These diverse movements accord with Tati's tendency to cram his compositions with gags that compete for our attention.

As we have already seen, we scan any film frame for information. This scanning brings time sharply into play. Only a very short shot forces us to try to take in the image all at once. In most shots, we get an initial overall impression that creates formal expectations. These expectations are quickly modified as our eye roams around the frame.

As we'd expect, our scanning of the shot is strongly affected by the presence of movement. A static



4.158 Strong, synchronized movements. In *42nd Street*, the shot is busy but the movements are synchronized.



4.159 Vivid, competing movements. The competing rhythms of movement in a busy shot from *Play Time* divide the audience's attention around the frame.

composition may keep pulling our attention back to a single element, as our first shot from *Day of Wrath* does with Anne's face (4.153). In contrast, a composition emphasizing movement may use the movement's speed or direction to guide our glance. In the second image from *Day of Wrath* (4.154), Anne and Martin are turned from us and are standing still. Thus the single moving thing in the frame—the cart—catches our attention. But when Martin speaks and turns, we look back at the couple, then back at the cart, and so on, in a shuttling, dynamic shift of attention.

Our time-bound process of scanning involves not only looking to and fro across the screen but also, in a sense, looking into its depths. A deep-space composition will often use background events to create expectations about what is about to happen in the foreground. "Composing in depth isn't simply a matter of pictorial richness," British director Alexander Mackendrick has remarked. "It has value in the narrative of the action, the pacing of the scene. Within the same frame, the director can organize the action so that preparation for what will happen next is seen in the background of what is happening now."

Our example from *The Dying Swan* (4.131–4.134) illustrates Mackendrick's point. The same principle is used in 4.160–4.162, from *Three Kings*. Here the



4.160

4.160–4.162 Movements arouse narrative expectations. In this shot from *Three Kings*, Chief Elgin comes in to tell the partying GIs that their superior is coming. Normally, when a character is looking offscreen, he or she is placed a little off center, leaving an empty space to imply the area that the person is looking at. (See the shot of Anne, 4.153.) But Elgin is decentered in a different way; here the space on the right side sits empty (4.160). That makes the tent flap behind him prominent. Without being aware of it, we're prepared for some action to develop there. Abruptly, the superior officer bursts into the background (4.161). He strides forward, which is always a powerful way to command the viewer's attention (4.162). As he comes into close-up, he ramps up the conflict, demanding to know where the men got alcohol.



4.161



4.162

frame starts off unbalanced, and the fact that it includes a background doorway prepares us for the scene's dramatic development. In addition, any movement from background to foreground is a strong attention-getter. At moments like these, the mise-en-scene is quietly setting up what will happen. By arousing our expectations, the director has engaged us with the unfolding action.

The *Dying Swan* and *Three Kings* examples also illustrate the force of frontality. In explaining one five-minute shot in his film *Adam's Rib*, George Cukor acknowledged this power. He remarked how the defense attorney was positioned to focus our attention on her client, who's reciting the reasons she shot her husband (4.163). Katharine Hepburn "had her back to the camera almost the whole time, but that had a meaning: she indicated to the audience that they should look at Judy Holliday."

All other things being equal, the viewer expects that more story information will come from a character's face than from a character's back. The viewer's attention will thus usually pass over figures that are turned away and fasten on figures that are positioned frontally. A more distant view can exploit frontality, too. In Hou Hsiao-hsien's *City of Sadness*, depth staging centers the Japanese woman coming to visit the hospital, and a burst of bright fabric also draws attention to her (4.164). Just as important, the other characters are turned away from us. It's characteristic of Hou's style to employ long shots with small changes in figure movement. The subdued, delicate effect of his scenes depends on our seeing characters' faces in relation to others' bodies and the overall setting.

Frontality can change over time to guide our attention to various parts of the shot. We've already seen alternating frontality at work in our *L'Avventura* scene, when Sandro and Claudia turn to and away from us (4.124, 4.125). When actors are in dialogue, a director may allow frontality to highlight one moment of one actor's performance and then give another performer more prominence (4.165, 4.166). This device reminds us that mise-en-scene can borrow devices from theatrical staging.



4.163 Movements coordinated with other cues for attention. In *Adam's Rib*, the wife who has shot her husband is given the greatest emphasis by three-point lighting, her animated gestures, and her three-quarter frontal positioning. Daringly, the most frontal and centered character is the nurse in the background, but Cukor keeps her out of focus and unmoving so that she won't distract from Judy Holliday's performance.



4.164 Frontality. Although she is farther from the camera than other characters, the woman visiting the hospital in *City of Sadness* draws our eye partly because she is the only one facing front. (Compare the unimportance of the front-facing nurse in 4.163.)



4.165



4.166

4.165–4.166 Fluctuating frontality. In a conversation in *The Bad and the Beautiful*, our attention fastens on the studio executive on the right because the other two characters are turned away from us (4.165). But when the producer turns to the camera, his centered position and frontal posture emphasize him (4.166).

A flash of frontality can be very powerful if it's integrated into the scene's unfolding drama. In the opening of *Rebel without a Cause*, three teenagers are being held at the police station (4.167). They don't know one another yet. When Jim sees that Plato is shivering, he drunkenly comes forward to offer the younger boy his sport coat (4.168, 4.169). Jim's frontality, forward movement, bright white shirt, and central placement emphasize his gesture. The moment foreshadows the ways in which Jim will become something of a father to Plato. Just as Plato takes the coat, Judy turns and notices Jim for the first time (4.170). Like Claudia's turn to the camera in our *L'Avventura* example, this sudden revelation spikes our interest. It prepares us for the tense romance that will develop between Judy and Jim in later scenes. Director Nicholas Ray has blended the scene's setting, lighting, costume, and staging in order to establish the core relationships among the three central characters.



4.167



4.168



4.169



4.170

4.167–4.170 Developing a scene over time. A long shot lays out the major characters in *Rebel without a Cause* (4.167). Jim comes forward, drawing our attention and arousing expectations of a dramatic exchange (4.168). Jim offers Plato his jacket, his action centered and his brightly lit white shirt making him the dominant player. Judy remains a secondary center of interest, segregated by the office window but highlighted by her bright red coat (4.169). Judy turns abruptly, and her face's frontal position lets us see her interest in Jim (4.170).

4.171–4.172 Frontality denied. At the height of the drama in *Naniwa Elegy*, Kenji Mizoguchi has the heroine move away from us, into depth (4.171). As she passes through patches of distant darkness, our curiosity about her emotional state intensifies (4.172). Compare the forward movement in 4.160–4.162 and 4.167–4.170.



4.171



4.172



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For more on Mizoguchi's staging style, see "Mizoguchi: Secrets of the exquisite image."

The director can also achieve a strong effect by denying frontality, keeping us in suspense about what a character's face reveals. At a climactic moment in Kenji Mizoguchi's *Naniwa Elegy*, some of the usual cues for emphasis are reversed (4.171, 4.172). We get a long shot rather than a closer view, and the character is turned from us and moving away from the camera, through patches of darkness. Ayako is confessing to her suitor that she's been another man's mistress. Her withdrawal conveys a powerful sense of shame, and we, like her friend, have to judge her sincerity based on her posture and voice. In this and our other examples, several techniques of mise-en-scene dovetail from moment to moment in order to engage us more vividly with the action.

Narrative Functions of Mise-en-Scene in *Our Hospitality*

Throughout this chapter, most of our examples have looked at mise-en-scene techniques in isolation, studying single shots or scenes. Now we're ready to see how these techniques work together to shape a film's overall form and, consequently, our experience of it.

Like most of Buster Keaton's films, *Our Hospitality* shows that directorial choices about mise-en-scene can economically advance the narrative and create a pattern of motifs. Since the film is a comedy, the mise-en-scene also creates gags. *Our Hospitality*, then, exemplifies what we will find in our study of every film technique: An individual element almost always has *several* functions, not just one.

Consider, for example, how the settings function in the plot of *Our Hospitality*. For one thing, they help divide the film into contrasting sections. The film begins with a prologue showing how the feud between the McKays and the Canfields kills off the young Canfield and the husband of the McKay family. We are left in suspense about the fate of the baby, Willie. Willie's mother flees with her son from their southern home to the North (action narrated to us mainly by an intertitle).

The plot jumps ahead many years to begin the main action, with the grown-up Willie living in New York. There are a number of gags concerning early-19th-century life in the metropolis, contrasting sharply with the prologue scene. Soon Willie receives word that he has inherited his parents' home in the South. A series of amusing short scenes follows as he takes a primitive train back to his birthplace. During these scenes, Keaton uses real locales, but by laying out the railroad tracks in different ways, he exploits the landscapes for surprising comic effects, which we'll examine shortly.

The rest of the film deals with Willie's stay in the southern town. On the day of his arrival, he wanders around and gets into a number of comic situations. That

night he stays in the Canfield house itself. An extended chase occurs the next day, moving through the countryside and back to the Canfield house for the settling of the feud. Thus the action depends heavily on shifts of setting that establish Willie's two journeys, as baby and as man, and later his wanderings to escape his enemies' pursuit.

Along with the shifts of setting, the narration is relatively unrestricted after Willie reaches the South. It switches between him and members of the Canfield family. We usually know more about what they're doing than Willie does, and the narrative generates suspense by showing them coming toward the places where Willie is hiding.

Specific settings fulfill distinct narrative functions. The McKay estate, which Willie envisions as a mansion, turns out to be a tumbledown shack. The McKay house is contrasted with the Canfield's palatial plantation home. In narrative terms, the Canfield home gains even more functional importance when the Canfield father forbids his sons to kill Willie on the premises: "Our code of honor forbids us to shoot him while he is a guest in our house." Once Willie overhears this, he determines *never* to leave.

Ironically, the home of Willie's enemies becomes the only safe spot in town, and many scenes are organized around the Canfield brothers' attempts to lure Willie outside. At the end of the film, another setting takes on significance: the landscape of meadows, mountains, riverbanks, rapids, and waterfalls across which the Canfields pursue Willie. The feud ends back in the Canfield house itself, with Willie now welcomed as the daughter's husband.

The pattern of development is clear: from the opening shootout at the McKay house that breaks up Willie's family to the final scene in the Canfield house with Willie becoming part of a new family. In such ways, every setting becomes highly motivated by the narrative's system of causes and effects, parallels and contrasts, and overall development.

The same narrative motivation marks the film's use of costume. Willie is characterized as a city boy through his dandified suit, but the southern gentility of the elder Canfield is represented by his white planter's suit. Props become important here. Willie's suitcase and umbrella succinctly summarize his role as visitor and wanderer, and the Canfields' ever-present pistols remind us of their goal of continuing the feud. In addition, a change of costume (Willie's disguising himself as a woman) enables him to escape from the Canfield household. At the end, when the characters put aside their guns, the feud is over.

Like setting, lighting in *Our Hospitality* has both general and specific functions. The film alternates scenes in darkness with scenes in daylight. The feuding in the prologue takes place at night; Willie's trip South and wanderings through the town occur in daylight; that night Willie comes to dinner at the Canfield's and stays as a guest; the next day, the Canfields pursue him; and the film ends that night with the marriage of Willie and the Canfield daughter.

More specifically, the bulk of the film is evenly lit in the three-point method. Yet the somber action of the prologue takes place in hard sidelighting (4.173, 4.174). Later, the murder scene is played out in flashes of light—lightning, gunfire—that fitfully punctuate the overall darkness. Because this sporadic lighting hides part of the action from us, it helps build suspense. The gunshots themselves are seen only as flashes in the darkness, and we learn that both men have died only during a burst of lightning.

Most economically of all, virtually every bit of the acting functions to support and advance the cause-effect chain of the narrative. The way Canfield sips and savors his mint julep establishes his southern ways; his southern hospitality in turn will not allow him to shoot a guest in his house. Similarly, Willie's every move expresses his diffidence or resourcefulness.

Even more concise is the way the film uses staging in depth to present two narrative events simultaneously, obliging us to scan back and forth between them. While the engineer drives the locomotive, the other cars pass him on a parallel



4.173



4.174

4.173–4.174 Dramatic lighting changes in *Our Hospitality*. When the elder McKay flings off his hat to douse the lamp, the illumination changes from a soft blend of key, fill, and backlight (4.173) to a stark key light from the fireplace (4.174).

“The most striking aspect of the Keaton pictures was the enormous amount of trouble lavished over every gag. Production value on such a scale requires more than a simple desire to make people laugh. It is not surprising that Keaton's childhood aim was to be a civil engineer.”
—Kevin Brownlow, film historian



4.175

4.175–4.177 Deep staging and narration: How to give the audience superior knowledge. During the train journey, within the same frame (4.175) we see both cause—the engineer's cheerful ignorance—and effect—the runaway cars. Later the Canfield boys make plans to shoot Willie, who overhears them in the background (4.176). While Willie ambles along unsuspectingly toward the camera, one Canfield waits in the foreground to ambush him (4.177).



4.176



4.177

track (4.175). In other shots, Willie's awareness or ignorance of a situation is displayed through planes of depth (4.176, 4.177). Thanks to such spatial arrangements, Keaton is able to pack together two story events, resulting in a tight narrative construction and in a relatively unrestricted narration. In 4.176, we know what Willie knows, and we expect that he will probably flee now that he understands the sons' plans. But in 4.177, we're aware, as Willie is not, that danger lurks around the corner, so there's suspense as we wonder whether the Canfield boys' ambush will succeed.

Keaton has unified his film further by using mise-en-scene to create specific motifs. For one thing, there is the repeated squabble between the anonymous husband and wife. On his way to his estate, Willie passes a husband throttling his wife. Willie intervenes to protect her; the wife proceeds to thrash Willie for butting in. On Willie's way back, he passes the same couple, still fighting, but studiously avoids them. Nevertheless, the wife aims a kick at him as he passes. The repetition strengthens the film's narrative unity, but the motif functions thematically, too, as another joke on the contradictions surrounding the idea of hospitality.

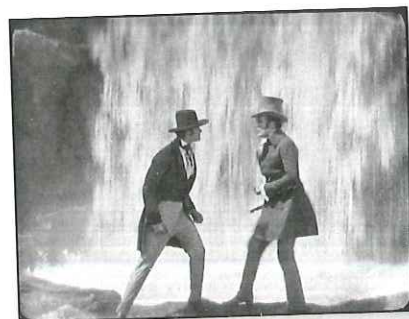
Other motifs recur. Willie's first hat is too tall to wear in a jouncing railway coach. (When it gets crushed, he swaps it for the trademark flat Keaton hat.) Willie's second hat serves to distract the Canfields when Willie coaxes his dog to fetch it. There is also a pronounced water motif in the film. Rain conceals from us the murders in the prologue and later saves Willie from leaving the Canfield home after dinner. ("It would be the death of anyone to go out on a night like this!") A river functions significantly in the final chase. And a waterfall appears soon after Willie's arrival in the South (4.178). This waterfall initially protects Willie by hiding him (4.179, 4.180) but later threatens both him and the Canfield daughter as they are nearly swept over it (4.186).



4.178



4.179



4.180

4.178–4.180 The water motif. After an explosion demolishes a dam, the water spills over a cliff and creates a waterfall (4.178). The new waterfall starts to hide Willie as he sits fishing (4.179). By the time the Canfields rush into the foreground, he is invisible (4.180).

Two specific motifs of setting help tighten the narrative. First there is the recurrence of an embroidered sampler hanging on the Canfield wall: "Love Thy Neighbor." It first appears in the prologue of the film, when seeing it motivates Canfield's attempt to stop the feud. The sampler reappears at the end when Canfield, enraged that Willie has married his daughter, glances at the wall, reads the inscription, and resolves to halt the years of feuding. His change in attitude is motivated by an item of setting.

The film also uses gun racks as a motif. In the prologue, each feuder goes to his mantelpiece to get his pistol. Later, when Willie arrives in town, the Canfields hurry to their gun rack and begin to load their pistols. Near the end of the film, when the Canfields return home after failing to find Willie, one of the sons notices that the gun rack is now empty. And, in the final shot, when the Canfields accept the marriage and lay down their arms, Willie produces from all over his person a staggering assortment of pistols swiped from the Canfields' own supply.

Yet *Our Hospitality* is more than a film whose narrative system relates economically to patterns of mise-en-scene. It's a comedy, and one of the funniest. We shouldn't be surprised to find that Keaton uses mise-en-scene for gags. Indeed, so unified is the film that most of the elements that create narrative economy yield comic effects too.

The mise-en-scene bristles with many comic elements. Settings are exploited for amusement—the ramshackle McKay estate, the Broadway of 1830, the specially cut train tunnel that just fits the old-fashioned train and its smokestack (4.181). Costume gags also stand out. Willie's disguise as a woman is exposed by a gap in the rear of his skirt; later, Willie puts the same costume on a horse to distract the Canfields. Most strongly, comedy arises from the staging and performances. The railroad engineer's high kick unexpectedly swipes off his conductor's hat (4.182). The elder Canfield sharpens his carving knife with ferocious energy, just inches from Willie's head. When Willie lands at the bottom of the river, he stands there looking left and right, his hand shading his eyes, before he realizes where he is. Later, Willie scuds down the river, leaping out of the water like a fish and slithering across the rocks.

Perhaps the only aspect of mise-en-scene that competes with the comic inventiveness of the performances is the film's use of deep space for gags. Many of the shots we've already examined function to create comedy as well: The engineer stands firmly oblivious to the separation of train cars from the engine (see 4.175) just as Willie is unaware that the Canfield boy is lurking murderously in the foreground (4.177).

Even more striking, though, is the deep-space gag that follows the demolition of the dam. The Canfield boys have been searching the town for Willie. In the meantime, Willie sits on a ledge, fishing. As the water bursts from the dam and sweeps over the cliff, it completely engulfs Willie (4.179). At that very instant, the Canfield brothers step into the foreground from either side of the frame, still looking for their victim (4.180). The water's concealment of Willie reduces him to a neutral background for the movement of the Canfields. This sudden eruption of new action into the scene surprises us, rather than generating suspense, since we were not aware that the Canfield sons were so close by. Here surprise is crucial to the comedy.

However appealing the individual gags are, *Our Hospitality* organizes its comic aspects as strictly as it does its other motifs. The film's journey pattern often arranges a series of gags according to a formal principle of theme and variations. For instance, during the train trip South, a string of gags is based on the idea of people encountering the train. Several people turn out to watch it pass, a tramp rides the rods, and an old man chucks rocks at the engine. Another swift series of gags takes the train tracks themselves as its theme. The variations include a humped track, a donkey blocking the tracks, curled and rippled tracks, and finally no tracks at all.

But the most complex theme-and-variations series can be seen in the motif of "the fish on the line." Soon after Willie arrives in town, he is angling and hauls up a minuscule fish. Shortly afterward, a huge fish yanks him into the water (4.183). Later in the film, through a series of mishaps, Willie becomes tied by a rope to one



4.181 Setting used for comic effect. The tunnel is cut to fit the old-fashioned train.



4.182 Performance as comic surprise. As the engineer, Keaton's father, Joe, uses his famous high-kick vaudeville stunt for this gag.

4.183–4.186 Men as fish. The fish-on-the-line motif begins as Willie is jerked into the water (4.183). Later, tied to Willie, the Canfield boy falls off the cliff (4.184), and Willie braces himself to be yanked after him (4.185). Still later, Willie dangles like a fish on the end of a pole (4.186).



4.183



4.184



4.185



4.186

of the Canfield sons. Many gags arise from this umbilical-cord linkage, including one that results in Canfield's being pulled into the water as Willie was earlier.

Perhaps the single funniest shot in the film occurs when Willie realizes that since the Canfield boy has fallen off the rocks (4.184), so must he (4.185). But even after Willie gets free of Canfield, the rope remains tied around his waist. So in the film's climax, Willie is dangling from a log over the waterfall (4.186). Here again, one element fulfills multiple functions. The fish-on-the-line device advances the narrative, becomes a motif unifying the film, and takes its place in a pattern of parallel gags involving variations of Willie on the rope. In such ways, *Our Hospitality* becomes an outstanding example of how a filmmaker can integrate cinematic mise-en-scene with narrative form and create comedy in the process.

SUMMARY

If we want to think like a filmmaker, we should notice mise-en-scene systematically. In any film, we can watch, first of all, for how setting, costume, lighting, and staging and performance are presented. Try tracing only one sort of element—say, setting or lighting—through a scene. How does it change, and what purposes does it fulfill?

We should also reflect on how mise-en-scene factors work together. Try pausing on a single image and scrutinizing it, as we've done throughout this chapter. How are the aspects of mise-en-scene arranged to attract our attention? Do they guide us toward key narrative elements—a face, a gesture, an object? Once we notice those elements, how are we cued to react?

Mise-en-scene can operate as part of narration, the unfolding of story information. How does it achieve this? Do the settings, lighting, costume, and staging and performance create curiosity, or suspense, or surprise? Do they become motifs that weave their ways through the entire film?

As we look more closely, we'll become aware of the vast range of possibilities offered by this area of technique. The simplest choice—where to put a light, what gesture an actor should employ—can have a powerful impact. Whether by intuition or by calculation, filmmakers have shown that mise-en-scene can engage and move viewers in an almost endless variety of ways.

CHAPTER

5

The Shot: Cinematography

In controlling mise-en-scene, the filmmaker stages an event to be filmed. But what happens in front of the camera isn't the whole story. That event has to be captured, on a strip of film or in a digital format. The recording process opens up a new area of choice and control: cinematography.

Even if you're casually shooting a bit of video, you're making decisions about cinematography. (You might be letting the camera's automatic settings make some of them for you, but that's a decision too.) You're choosing the photographic qualities of the shot, such as exposure and frame rate. You're also choosing how to frame the shot, and whether to move the camera. And you're deciding how long the shot should run. These areas of choice are the same ones that filmmakers consider carefully. Just as nothing could be left to chance in lighting a shot like the one from *Inglourious Basterds* (4.1), so all the filmmaker's decisions about camerawork are shaped by a single concern: How will this creative choice affect the viewer?

The Photographic Image

Cinematography (literally, "writing in movement") depends to a large extent on *photography* ("writing in light"). Some filmmakers, working with 16mm or 35mm stock, have abandoned the camera to work directly on the material itself. But even the filmmaker who draws, paints, or scratches on film is creating patterns of light on celluloid. Most often, the filmmaker uses a camera to regulate how light from some object will be registered on the medium—sensitized photographic film or a video camera's computer chip. In either case, the filmmaker can select the range of tonalities, manipulate the speed of motion, and transform perspective.

The Range of Tonalities

You've probably noticed that it's rather hard to take a picture of a person lit by a sunny window. If Aunt Grace is well exposed, her garden outside the window is too bright. (The technical jargon is "blown-out.") If you expose for the garden, Aunt Grace falls into shadow. This disparity is only one example of a broader area of choice in cinematography: the control of the image's range of tones and shades. Tonality is a matter of considering how the light registers on the film. Lighting, as we've seen, is a factor in mise-en-scene, but it's intimately connected with cinematography too. In production the cinematographer is almost always the person who arranges the lighting, so he or she is in the best position to control a shot's tonality.

Contrast Let's start with one area of tonal control, the degree of contrast. **Contrast** refers to the comparative difference between the darkest and lightest

“Both [cinematographer] Floyd [Crosby] and I wanted [*High Noon*] to look like a documentary, or a newsreel from the period of the 1880s, if film had existed at that time—which, of course, it did not. I believe that we came close to our goal by using flat lighting, a grainy texture in the printing and an unfiltered white sky.”

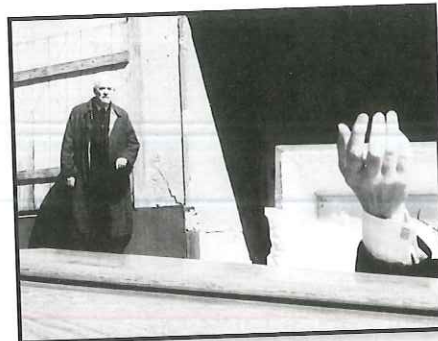
—Fred Zinnemann, director

areas of the frame. As we saw in Chapter 4, our eyes are highly sensitive to differences of color, shape, texture, and other aspects of a picture. Contrasts in the image help filmmakers to guide the viewer's eye to important parts of the frame and to give the shot an emotionally expressive quality—somber, cheerful, or whatever.

Most professional cinematography strives for a middle range of contrast: pure blacks, pure whites, and a large range in between, either grays (in black-and-white filming) or hues (in color filming). A higher-contrast image displays bright white highlights, stark black areas, and a narrow range of shades in between. A low-contrast image displays many intermediate grays or color shades with no true white or black areas (5.1–5.6). High-contrast images can seem stark and dramatic, whereas low-contrast ones suggest more muted emotional states.



5.1



5.2



5.3



5.4



5.5



5.6

5.1–5.6 Tonal contrast in black-and-white and color. Most black-and-white films employ a balance of grays, blacks, and whites, as in this shot from *Casablanca* (5.1). The dream sequence early in Ingmar Bergman's *Wild Strawberries* relies on high-contrast imagery, in this shot (5.2). Many shots in Michelangelo Antonioni's *Red Desert* have unusually low contrast, enhanced by the flat lighting with almost no grays (5.3). Some contemporary films emphasize deep, rich blacks and push toward a high-contrast and limited palette in the color design (5.4). Some contemporary films emphasize deep, rich blacks and push toward a high-contrast look, as in *Domino* (5.4). You can see the different degrees of contrast more clearly if we drain the color out of the original shots (5.5, 5.6).



5.7



5.8



5.9

5.7–5.9 Color film and tonal range. Technicolor became famous for its sharp, saturated hues, as seen in the trolley scene of *Meet Me in St. Louis* (5.7). Soviet filmmakers used a domestically made stock that tended to lower contrast and give the image a murky greenish-blue cast. Andrei Tarkovsky stressed these qualities in the monochromatic color design of his shadowy *Stalker* (5.8). Len Lye's abstract *Rainbow Dance* exploited the English stock Gasparcolor to create pure, saturated silhouettes that split and recombine (5.9).

Many factors are used to control contrast, including lighting, filters, choice of film stock, laboratory processing, and postproduction work. Historically, photochemical filmmaking relied on photographic stocks with various degrees of sensitivity to light. Some black-and-white films gathered more light than others, and so were suited for filming news events in actual conditions. Others gave a richer, wider contrast range, and these were used for most of the studio films of the 1920s through the 1960s, where lighting could be controlled exactly. Similarly, by picking different color film stocks, cinematographers could vary the image's color contrast (5.7–5.9).

Why is *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* in black and white? "The words. The dialogue would have played differently in color."

—Ernest Lehman, screenwriter

Exposure A crucial way to alter the tonalities in the image is through **exposure**. Exposure regulates how much light passes through the camera lens. Often we notice exposure only when an image seems too dark (underexposed) or too bright (overexposed). We expect that filmmakers will try for a balanced exposure. Sometimes, though, that's difficult to achieve and trade-offs must be made. Filmmakers constantly face the choice between the blown-out window and the silhouetted Aunt Grace in our amateur snapshot (5.10, 5.11).

Sometimes a filmmaker wants unbalanced exposure. American film noir cinematography of the 1940s underexposed shadowy regions of the image in keeping



5.10



5.11

5.10–5.11 Exposure levels. For *Kasba*, Indian director Kumar Shahani decided to expose for the shop interior in one scene and let the countryside behind blow out (5.10). In another scene he exposed for the background and created silhouetted window frames (5.11). The first shot displays the vibrant colors of the shop's wares, while the second emphasizes the difference between the market activities outside and the mysterious interior.



5.12

5.12–5.13 Overexposure. In *Vidas Secas*, Nelson Pereira dos Santos overexposes the windows of the prison cell to sharpen the contrast between the prisoner's confinement and the world of freedom outside (5.12). *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* used digital grading to simulate photographic overexposure in the Moria sequence. In 5.13 the overexposure of the wizard's staff makes the Fellowship a bright island threatened by countless orcs in the darkness.



5.13

“[In digital cinematography] you start seeing lines on people's faces that aren't really there. I find myself using diffusion filters that I haven't used in 20 years just to be kinder to the faces of the people I'm photographing.”

—Stuart Dryburgh, cinematographer

with low-key lighting techniques. Likewise, overexposure can create expressive effects (5.12). In addition, images shot with correct exposure can be overexposed or underexposed in developing, printing, or digital postproduction (5.13).

Exposure can be affected by **filters**—slices of glass or gelatin put in front of the lens of the camera or printer to reduce certain frequencies of light reaching the film. Filters can alter the range of tonalities in radical ways. Hollywood cinematographers since the 1920s have sought to add glamour to close-ups, especially of women, by means of diffusion filters, along with gels or silks placed over light sources (5.14). Before modern improvements in film stocks and lighting made it practical to shoot most outdoor night scenes at night, filmmakers routinely made such scenes by using blue filters in sunlight—a technique called *day for night* (5.15).

Changing Tonalities after Filming Filmmakers have often manipulated the image's tonalities after filming. For instance, films could be printed on stocks that yielded different tonal values. Avant-garde directors have explored unusual ways of altering images after they came from the camera (5.16, 5.17).



5.14

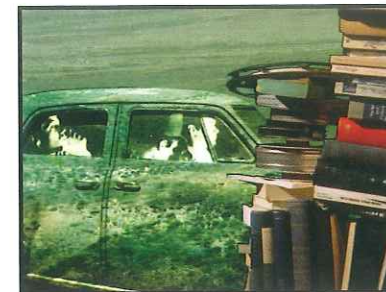
5.14–5.15 Filters alter tonality. Studio films like *A Farewell to Arms* often employed diffusion filters, along with soft and high-key lighting, to create romantic images of women (5.14). For *The Searchers*, this scene of the protagonists spying on an Indian camp at night was shot in sunlight using day-for-night filters (5.15).



5.15

One of the most common adjustments in the silent-film era involved adding color to black-and-white images through tinting and toning. *Tinting* is accomplished by dipping the already developed film into a bath of dye. The dark areas remain black and gray, while the lighter areas pick up the color (5.18). *Toning* worked in an opposite fashion. The dye was added during the developing of the positive print. As a result, darker areas are colored, while the lighter portions of the frame remain white or only faintly colored (5.19). More ambitious and rare was hand-coloring, which filled certain parts of the shot with an appropriate color (5.20). Later filmmakers occasionally revived silent-film processes (5.21).

Many more adjustments of the image's tonality can be made in postproduction. For photochemically based filmmaking, the role of *grader* or *tinter* was created to alter the color range of a print. The rise of digital filmmaking supplied even more tools to the expert now called the *colorist*. Once the film exists as a set of files, the adjustments can be very precise. For example, with analog color grading, any



5.16



5.17

5.16–5.17 Experimental manipulation after filming. Throughout *Power and Water*, Pat O'Neill creates spectacular imagery by use of optical printing, matte work, and other special effects (5.16). By scratching the emulsion, Stan Brakhage emphasizes the eye motif that runs through *Reflections on Black* (5.17).



5.18



5.19

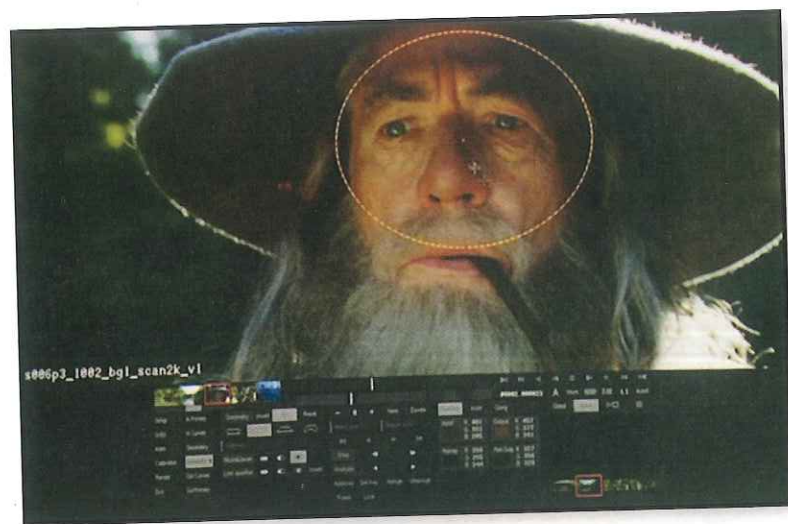


5.20



5.21

5.18–5.21 Adding color to black and white. Tinting creates a brownish color across the entire frame in the 1914 film *The Wrath of the Gods* (5.18). The color suggests the heat of an erupting volcano. In *Cenere* (“Ashes,” 1916) the deep blue of the dark areas and the nearly white patches are characteristic of toning (5.19). Night scenes like this were often colored blue. Firelight was frequently red, while interiors were commonly amber. Hand-colorists used stencils laid over each frame to create vibrant imagery, as in Albert Capellani's 1906 *Aladdin, or the Wonderful Lamp* (5.20). For her experimental film *Daisies*, Vera Chytilová employs a crimson toning (5.21).



5.22 Selective digital grading. In this close-up from *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*, the oval on the actor's face indicates the area within which the colorist wants to change the lighting or the color.

change made to a shot affected the entire frame area. But digital programs allow the colorist to target specific parts of the frame (5.22) and maintain that adjustment even if the parts shift during the shot. Today, some cinematographers bring a colorist to the set to make decisions during shooting.

Likewise, to get a day-for-night effect, the scene will be darkened in postproduction. For the climactic night sequence in *Winter's Bone*, two women take the heroine to a pond. Some shots were taken in bright daylight, others were taken at dusk, and the close views of the women in the boat were shot at night, with lamps providing dim illumination. Through digital grading, all the shots were blended into a uniformly dark sequence. *Julie & Julia*, a romantic comedy, used the opposite technique, adding sunlight to scenes that had been shot on overcast days.

Digital postproduction has reshaped every area of technique, from mise-en-scene and cinematography to editing and sound. (See "A Closer Look," pp. 165–166.) With more opportunities, however, come more forced decisions. One editor wonders whether digital postproduction offers too many alternatives: "I still generally feel, if you don't have it [in shooting], it wasn't meant to be. You can't manipulate everything like that or we might as well all be in animation."

Speed of Motion

A gymnast's performance seen in slow motion, ordinary action accelerated to comic speed, a tennis serve stopped in a freeze-frame—our films and videos are full of such effects. We don't often reflect on the fact that they depend on a photographic power unique to cinema: control over the speed of movement seen on the screen.

The speed of the motion presented onscreen depends on two factors: the rate at which the film was shot and the rate of projection. Both **rates** are calculated in frames per second. The standard rate for film-based shooting, established when synchronized-sound movies came in at the end of the 1920s, was 24 frames per second (fps). Today's 35mm cameras commonly offer the filmmaker a choice of anything between 8 and 64 fps, with specialized cameras offering a wider range of choice. Professional HD cameras, typically standardized at around 24, 25, and 30 fps, offer a comparable menu of frame rates.

If the movement is to look accurate on the screen, the rate of shooting should correspond to the rate of projection. This is what normally happens with modern films. The main problem comes with silent films, which are sometimes shown speeded up from their original frame rates. Before the filming rate was standardized at 24 fps, films were taken at anywhere from 16 to 22 fps, and so they look jerky when screened at 24 fps. Projected at the correct speed, silent films look as smooth as movies made today.

As the silent films show, if a film is exposed at fewer frames per second than the projection rate (say, 16 or 18 frames), the screen action will look speeded up. This is the *fast-motion* effect sometimes seen in comedies. But fast motion has long been used for other purposes. In F. W. Murnau's *Nosferatu*, the vampire's coach rushes skittishly across the landscape, suggesting his supernatural power. In



A CLOSER LOOK

FROM MONSTERS TO THE MUNDANE

Computer-Generated Imagery in *The Lord of the Rings*

The films adapted from J. R. R. Tolkien's trilogy *The Lord of the Rings* (*The Fellowship of the Ring*, *The Two Towers*, and *The Return of the King*) show how computer-generated imagery (CGI) can be used for huge battle scenes, plausible monsters, and magical events. The films also illustrate how CGI shapes less spectacular, more mundane areas of production.

CGI was used at every stage of production. In pre-production, a sort of animated storyboard (a *previs*, for "previsualization") was made, consisting of *animatics*, or rough, computer-generated versions of the scenes. Each installment's *previs* was about as long as the finished film and coordinated the work of the huge staff involved in both digital and physical tasks.

During production of the three films, CGI helped create the mise-en-scene. Many shots digitally stitched together disparate elements, blending full-size settings, miniature sets, and matte paintings (see 5.60). A total of 68 miniature sets were built, and computer manipulation was required in each case to make them appear real or to allow camera movements through them. Computer paint programs could generate matte paintings for the sky, clouds, distant cliffs, and forests that appeared behind the miniatures.

Rings also drew on the rapidly developing capacity of CGI to create characters. The war scenes were staged with a small number of actual actors in costumes, but CGI added vast crowds of soldiers alongside them. As happens often nowadays, the *Rings* project demanded new software programs. A crucial program was Massive (for "Multiple Agent Simulation System in Virtual Environment"). Using motion-capture on a few *agents* (costumed actors), the team could build a number of different military maneuvers, assigning all of them to the thousands of crude, digitally generated figures. By giving each figure a rudimentary artificial intelligence—such as the ability to see an approaching soldier and identify it as friend or foe—Massive could generate a scene in which figures scattered or gathered in unpredictable ways (5.23).

The monsters encountered by the characters during their quest were more elaborately designed than the troops. A detailed three-dimensional model of each

creature was captured with a scanning wand that could read into recesses and folds. A new software system, Character Mapper, captured motion from an actor and then adjusted body mass and muscles to imaginary skeletons. In the cave-troll sequence, the large, squat creature swings its limbs and flexes its muscles in a believable fashion.

The skeletal Gollum was created with a combination of motion-capture and CGI, but human actors didn't escape the CGI process. The main characters were given digital look-alikes who replaced stunt doubles, executing dangerous or difficult movements. The story demanded that full-size actors play three-foot-tall hobbits who interact with characters considerably taller than them. The size difference was often created during filming by using small doubles or by placing the hobbits farther from the camera in false-perspective sets.

Cinematography also depended on CGI. For the cave-troll scene, director Peter Jackson donned a virtual-reality helmet and planned camera positions by moving around a virtual set and facing a virtual troll. The camera positions were motion-captured and reproduced in the actual filming of the sequence—which has a rough, handheld style quite different from the rest of the scenes.

In postproduction, animators erased telephone poles in location shots and helicopter blades dipping into the aerial shots of the Fellowship's voyage across mountains. Specialized programs added details, such as the ripples in the water in the Mirror of Galadriel.

Perhaps most important, digital grading altered the color of shots, giving each major location a distinctive look. Rivendell's scenes are in autumnal tones, while the early scenes in the Shire were given a yellow glow that enhanced the sunshine and green fields. The grading also utilized an innovative program that permitted adjusting the color values of individual elements within a shot. When Galadriel shows Frodo her mirror, she glows bright white, contrasting with the deep blue tones of Frodo's figure and setting (5.24). Thanks to digital grading, CGI techniques can do more than create crowds and creatures: They can shape the visual style of an entire film.

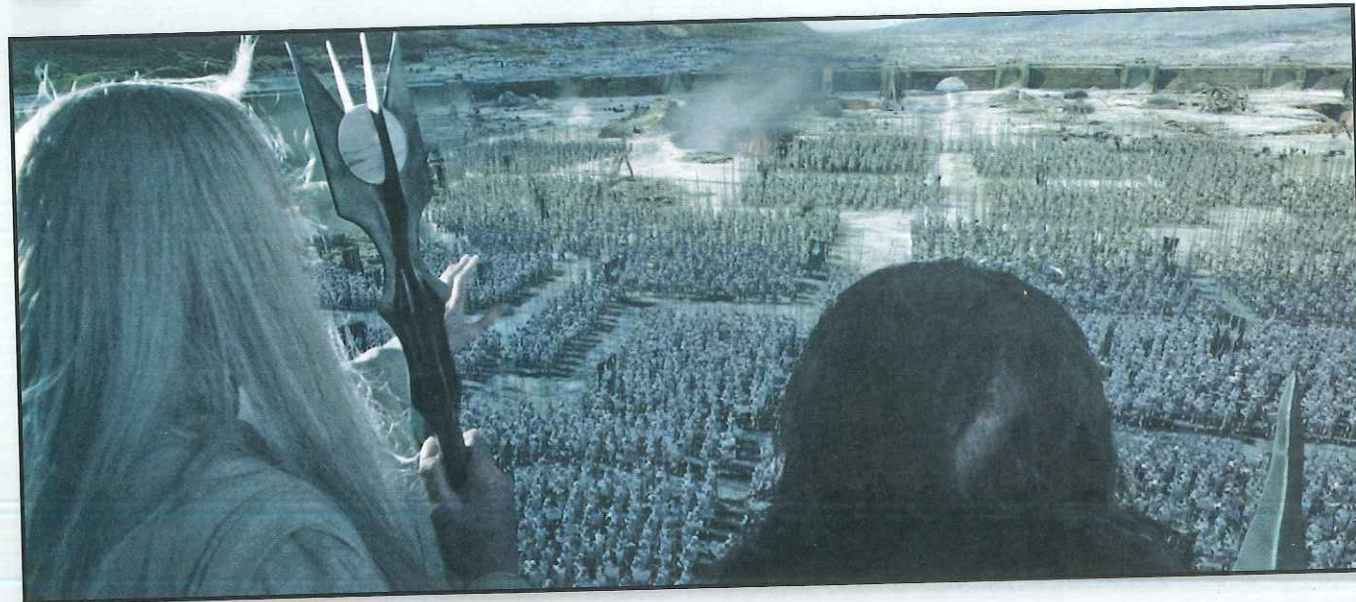
“I have a hard enough time making up my mind about things without going into a DI suite; I don't think I'd ever get out of there. The process creates too many options.”

—Paul Thomas Anderson, director, *There Will Be Blood*



A CLOSER LOOK

Continued



5.23



5.24

5.23–5.24 Mise-en-scene and cinematography controlled by digital postproduction. Vast crowds of soldiers with individualized movements were generated by the Massive software program for *The Two Towers* (5.23). In *The Fellowship of the Ring*, selective digital color grading makes one figure bright white while the rest of the scene has a muted tone (5.24).

Godfrey Reggio's *Koyaanisqatsi*, delirious fast motion renders the hectic rhythms of urban life (5.25). More recent films have used fast motion to grab our attention and accelerate the pace, whisking us through a setting to the heart of the action.

The more frames per second shot (say, 48 or 64), the slower the screen action will appear. The resulting *slow-motion* effect is used notably in Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* to render sports events in detail, a function that continues to be

important today. The technique can also be used for expressive purposes. In Rouben Mamoulian's *Love Me Tonight*, the members of a hunt decide to ride quietly home to avoid waking the sleeping deer; their ride is filmed in slow motion to create a comic depiction of noiseless movement.

Today slow-motion footage often functions to suggest that the action takes place in a dream or fantasy. It can also be used to convey enormous power, as in a martial-arts or superhero film. Slow motion is also used for emphasis, becoming a way of dwelling on a moment of spectacle or high drama. Slow-motion scenes of a couple walking add a lyrical rhythm to Wong Kar-wai's *In the Mood for Love*, suggesting that they are unwittingly dancing with each other.

To enhance expressive effects, filmmakers can change the speed of motion during a shot. Often the change of speed helps create special effects. In *Die Hard* a fireball bursts up an elevator shaft toward the camera. During the filming, the fire at the bottom of the shaft was filmed at 100 fps, slowing down its progress, and then shot at faster speeds as it erupted upward, giving the impression of an accelerating explosion.

The *Die Hard* sequence creates a realistic-looking explosion, but sometimes filmmakers choose to call our attention to changes in the speed of capturing the action. Varying the frame rate during shooting is called **ramping**. Since ramping alters exposure, lighting levels on the set have to be coordinated with the frame rate. For the fight scenes in *Sherlock Holmes*, the Phantom, a specialized digital camera used to create slow motion, was ramped from 24 fps to 800 fps and then back to 24 fps. During the passage of slow motion, a burst of light kept the exposure constant.

Ramping is sometimes used as a one-off effect to emphasize a bit of action, as in the *Die Hard* and *Sherlock Holmes* scenes. But it can also function as a motif and create parallels. In an early scene of Michael Mann's *The Insider*, researcher Jeffrey Wigand leaves the tobacco company that has just fired him. As he crosses the lobby toward a revolving door, his brisk walk suddenly slows to a dreamlike drifting. The point of this striking stylistic choice becomes apparent only in the film's last shot. Lowell Bergman, the TV producer who has helped Wigand reveal that addictive substances are added to cigarettes, has been dismissed from CBS. Bergman strides across the lobby, and as he passes through the revolving door, his movement glides into extreme slow motion. The repetition of the technique compares two men who have lost their livelihoods as a result of telling the truth: two insiders who have become outsiders.

There are more extreme forms of fast and slow motion. *Time-lapse* cinematography permits us to see the sun set in seconds or a flower sprout, bud, and bloom in a minute. For this, a very low shooting speed is required—perhaps one frame per minute, hour, or even day. For *high-speed* cinematography, such as recording a bullet shattering glass, the camera may expose hundreds or thousands of frames per second. Most cameras can be used for time-lapse shooting, but high-speed cinematography requires specially designed cameras.

After filming, the filmmaker can still control the speed of movement on the screen. Until the early 1990s, the most common tool for this was the optical printer. This device rephotographs a film, copying all or part of each original frame onto another reel of film. The optical printer can reverse the action, accelerate it by skipping frames, slow the action by reprinting frames (*stretch printing*), or freeze the action by printing the same frame over and over. Today digital postproduction permits the same manipulations that were pioneered on the optical printer.

Many experimental films have played with the possibilities of altering the speed of original footage. With the help of an optical printer, Ken Jacobs's *Tom Tom the Piper's Son* (12.11) explores the images of an early silent film by pausing the shots and enlarging portions of them. More mainstream films have also exploited the freeze-frame effect. It can underscore a piece of action or a line of dialogue,



5.25 Fast motion. Cars become blurs of light in *Koyaanisqatsi*.



5.26 Freeze-frame for a closing shot. In *A Moment of Innocence*, the final freeze-frame lets us contemplate what the gestures imply about the young men's attitudes toward the woman. Another example of an irresolute final freeze-frame is 3.10.

or suggest a character's memory. At the end of the film a freeze-frame can linger on a situation, imprinting it on the viewer's mind. It can also suggest that the story action hasn't quite resolved (5.26).

Perspective

You are standing on railroad tracks, looking toward the horizon. The tracks seem to meet in the distance, and the track ties get steadily smaller as they recede. Yet you know that the tracks are really parallel, and the ties are of uniform size. What is happening?

Your eye gathers light reflected from the scene and creates an image of space and the things in it. The objects in the scene have some regular relation to one another. The tracks converge and the ties get smaller. Your vision, in other words, shows a *perspective* view of the scene: a set of spatial relations organized around a viewing point.

The lens of a photographic camera does roughly what your eye does. Located at a specific point, it gathers light from the scene and transmits that light onto the flat surface of the film or video chip to form an image that represents size, depth, and other dimensions of the scene. So a camera lens also creates a perspective image.

One difference between the eye and the camera, though, is that photographic lenses may be changed, and each type of lens will render perspective in different ways. If two different lenses photograph the same scene, the perspective relations in the resulting images can be drastically different. As we'll see, a wide-angle lens could exaggerate the depth you see down the track or could make the foreground trees and buildings seem to bulge. A telephoto lens could drastically reduce the depth, making the trees seem very close together and nearly the same size.

The Lens: Focal Length Filmmakers think carefully about the perspective of an image. The main area of choice involves the **focal length** of the lens. In technical terms, the focal length is the distance from the center of the lens to the point where light rays converge to a point of focus on the film. The focal length alters the size and proportions of the things we see, as well as how much depth we perceive in the image.

We can distinguish three general sorts of lenses, based on their focal lengths and the ways they present perspective. We'll use 35mm film as our reference point, although the three types of lenses hold good for digital formats as well.

1. The short-focal-length (wide-angle) lens

In 35mm-gauge cinematography, a lens of less than 35mm in focal length is considered a wide-angle lens. It's called that because it takes in a relatively wide field of view. But in capturing the wider field, these lenses tend to distort straight lines lying near the edges of the frame, bulging them outward (5.27–5.29). Less obviously, a short focal-length lens exaggerates depth, making figures in the foreground seem bigger and those in the distance seem farther away (5.30). As a result, when figures move toward or away from the camera, a wide-angle lens makes them seem to cover ground more rapidly.

2. The middle-focal-length (normal) lens

A common length for a medium, or normal lens, in 35mm and high-end digital cinematography, is 50mm (5.31). This lens seeks to avoid noticeable perspective distortion. With a medium lens, horizontal and vertical lines are rendered as straight and perpendicular. (Compare the bulging effect of the wide-angle lens.) Parallel lines should recede to distant vanishing points, as in our railroad tracks example. Foreground and background should seem neither stretched apart (as with the wide-angle lens) nor squashed together (as with the telephoto lens).

“I’m standing around waiting to see where the 50mm is going to be, or what size lens they’re putting on, and in that unwritten book in my brain, I said, ‘Don’t ever let them shoot you full face, on a wide-angle lens, you’ll end up looking like Dumbo.’”

—Tony Curtis, actor



5.27



5.28



5.29



5.30

3. The long-focal-length (telephoto) lens

Wide-angle lenses stretch space along the frame edges, but longer lenses flatten the space along the camera axis. Cues for depth and volume are reduced. The planes seem squashed together, much as when you look through a telescope or binoculars (5.32). (For this reason, long lenses are also called telephoto lenses.) Long lenses take in a narrower angle of vision than wide-angle or normal lenses do. As you'd expect, the effect of movement with a long lens is the opposite of what happens with the wide angle. A person moving toward the camera takes more time to cover what seems to be a small distance.

Today long lenses are typically 100mm or greater in length. You'll often see them at work in televised sports events, since they magnify action at a distance. In a baseball game, there will invariably be shots taken from almost directly behind the pitcher, using a camera located beyond the centerfield wall. You've probably noticed that such shots make the umpire, catcher, batter, and pitcher look unnaturally close to one another. In other contexts, the effect of a very long lens can be otherworldly (5.33).



5.32



5.33

5.32–5.33 Long lenses and perspective. In 5.32, from Chen Kaige's *Life on a String*, the long lens squashes the crowd members almost to a single plane. It also makes the rapids behind the men virtually a two-dimensional backdrop. In *Koyaanisqatsi*, an airport is filmed from a great distance, and an exceptionally long focal length makes the plane seem to land on a highway (5.33).

5.27–5.30 Wide angle and perspective. In *Don't Look Now*, as the camera swivels to follow John Baxter, the wide-angle lens makes a street lamp he passes appear to lean to the right (5.27), and then to the left (5.28). Wide-angle close shots risk distortion, as with the young woman's hand in Mikhail Kalatozov's *The Cranes Are Flying* (5.29). In *The Little Foxes*, the lens makes the characters seem relatively far from one another, even though they're within a small area of the parlor (5.30).



5.31 The medium focal-length lens. A shot made with a medium lens in *His Girl Friday*. Contrast the sense of distance among the actors seen in 5.30.

“In *New York, New York*, we shot only with a 32mm lens, the whole movie. We tried to equate the old style of framing, the old style meaning 1946–53.”

—Martin Scorsese, director

“I tend to rely on only two kinds of lenses to compose my frames: very wide angle and extreme telephoto. I use the wide angle because when I want to see something, I want to see it completely, with the most detail possible. As for the telephoto, I use it for close-ups because I find it creates a real ‘encounter’ with the actor. If you shoot someone’s face with a 200-millimeter lens, the audience will feel like the actor is really standing in front of them. It gives presence to the shot. So I like extremes. Anything in between is of no interest to me.”

—John Woo, director, *A Better Tomorrow* and *Hard Boiled*

Lens length can distinctly affect the spectator’s experience. For example, expressive qualities can be suggested by lenses that distort objects or characters. A decision about lens length can make a character or object blend into the setting (5.34–5.36) or stand out in sharp relief (5.37). Filmmakers may exploit the flattening effects of the long focal-length lens to create solid masses of space as in an abstract painting (5.38). A director can use the distortions of lens lengths for surprise effects as well (5.39, 5.40).

In taking snapshots you’ve probably used a **zoom lens** to enlarge some part of a shot. The lens changes framing, but it also changes focal length. So the zoom not only resizes what’s shown; it also changes the image’s perspective. With its variable focal length, the zoom combines the wide-angle, medium, and telephoto options we’ve already looked at.

Fixed focal-length lenses can’t change perspective relations while the camera is running, but the zoom can. Zoom lenses were originally used for documentary shooting. Most filmmakers didn’t try to zoom during filming, because they worried that the rapid warping or flattening of the image would be distracting. But in the late 1950s, filmmakers began zooming while shooting.

Since then, the zoom has sometimes been used to substitute for moving the camera forward or backward. During a zoom, the camera remains stationary, while the zoom shot magnifies or demagnifies the objects filmed (5.41–5.43). It can also create intriguing deformations of depth and scale, as we’ll see when we examine *Wavelength*.

If you’re not yet convinced that the choice of focal length matters, consider Ernie Gehr’s abstract experimental film *Serene Velocity*. The scene is an empty corridor. Gehr shot the setting with a zoom lens, but in a very unusual way.

[I] divided the mm range of the zoom lens in half and starting from the middle I recorded changes in mm positions. . . . The camera was not moved at all. The zoom lens was not moved during recording either. Each frame was recorded individually as a still. Four frames to each position. To give an example: I shot the first four frames at 50mm. The next four frames I shot at 55mm. And then, for a certain



5.34



5.35



5.36

5.34–5.36 Long lenses and movement. In *Tootsie*, Dorothy becomes visible among the crowd at a considerable distance from the camera (5.34). After taking 20 steps, “she” seems only slightly closer (5.35). Finally, after taking 36 steps, Dorothy seems somewhat closer (5.36). The shot is held long enough for us to absorb Michael’s makeover and to recognize that the masquerade is successful: He can merge into the crowd.



5.37

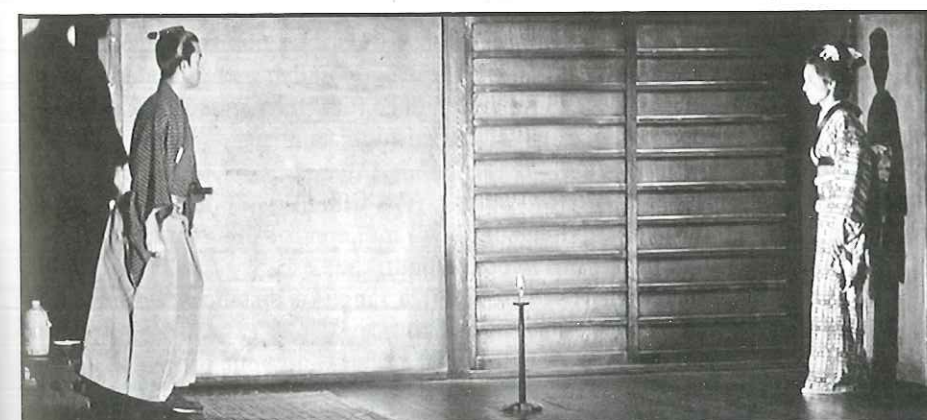


5.38

5.37–5.38 Lens length for expressive effect. In Ilya Trauberg’s *China Express*, wide-angle distortion makes the man’s hand more threatening (5.37). In *Eternity and a Day*, a long lens turns the beach and sea into two vertical strips behind the character (5.38).



5.39



5.40

5.39–5.40 Focal length for surprise and suspense. In Kurosawa’s *Red Beard*, when the mad patient comes into the intern’s room, a long focal-length lens makes her seem close and threatening (5.39). But a cut to a more perpendicular angle shows that they’re actually several feet apart and that he is not yet in danger (5.40).



5.41



5.42



5.43

5.41–5.43 The zoom at work. The opening of *The Conversation* presents one of the most famous zoom shots in cinema. A long, slow zoom-in arouses considerable uncertainty about its target (5.41, 5.42), until it finally centers on a mime and our protagonist, surveillance technician Harry Caul (5.43). You can see how the varied focal lengths change perspective: In 5.41, the street tapers into the distance, but at longer lengths (5.42, 5.43), the pavement's grid doesn't recede.

duration, approximately 60 feet, I went back and forth, four frames at 50mm, four frames at 55mm; four frames at 50mm, four frames at 55mm; etc. . . . for about 60 feet. Then I went to 45–60 [mm] and did the same for about 60 feet. Then to 40–65, and so on.

Onscreen, we see an image whose perspective relations pop in and out at us rhythmically—first with little difference, but gradually with greater tension between a telephoto image and a wide-angle image (5.44). In *Serene Velocity* Gehr engages us sheerly through formal patterning of focal lengths.

The Lens: Depth of Field and Focus You're well aware that a photograph or a movie scene can show some things in **focus** and let other things get fuzzy. That effect is, once more, due to the lens's focal length.

Every lens has a specific **depth of field**: a range of distances within which objects can be photographed in sharp focus, given a certain exposure setting. For example, suppose you are shooting with a 50mm lens and your subject is 10 feet away. At one common exposure level, focusing the lens at 10 feet will render everything between 8½ and 12 feet away in acceptable focus. Outside that zone, either closer to the lens or farther way, objects will blur.

All other things being equal, a wide-angle lens has a relatively greater depth of field than a telephoto lens. A 32mm lens focused at 10 feet yields an acceptable focal range of about 6 to 25 feet. The opening shot of *Simple Men* shows depth of field at work (5.45).

Depth of field isn't the same as deep space, discussed in Chapter 4. *Deep space* is a term for the way the filmmaker has staged the action on several different planes, *regardless of whether all of these planes are in focus*. In the case



5.44 Formal experiment with lens length. In *Serene Velocity*, telephoto shots of a hallway are juxtaposed to wide-angle shots taken from the same spot, creating a pulsating rhythm and an abstract play of rectangular shapes.



5.45 Focal length in action. The opening shot of *Simple Men* focuses on the robber and the security guard in the middle ground. The yellow railing in the foreground is out of focus. In the distant background stands the female robber's partner, who is out of focus too. The lens's depth of field picked out certain zones of space in front of the camera.

of *Our Hospitality*, those planes usually are in sharp focus, but in other films, not every plane of deep space is in focus. In the *Simple Men* shot (5.45), we can see three planes of depth, but they aren't all in focus. Deep space is a matter of mise-en-scene, involving how the scene is arranged. Depth of field depends on the camera, with the lens determining what layers of a deep-space staging are in focus.

If depth of field controls perspective relations by determining which planes will be in focus, what choices are open to the filmmaker? He or she may opt for what is usually called *selective focus*—choosing to focus on only one plane and letting the other planes blur. As the *Simple Men* example suggests, selective focus guides the viewer's eye: We tend to pay attention to what is most clearly visible. Often this involves focusing on the main character and throwing the surroundings out of focus (5.46). Alternatively the director may choose to put an unexpected plane in focus and let the rest blur (5.47).

In Hollywood during the 1940s, partly because of the influence of *Citizen Kane*, filmmakers began using lenses of shorter focal length, along with more sensitive film stock and higher light levels, to yield a greater depth of field (5.48). This practice came to be called **deep focus**. Combined with deep-space staging, it became a major stylistic option in the 1940s and 1950s (5.49). The technique was



5.46



5.47

5.46–5.47 Depth of field yields selective focus. As often happens with selective focus, the main point of interest in this shot from Agnès Varda's *Vagabond* (*Sans toi ni loi*) is kept in focus, while the background is out of focus (5.46). More unusual is Léos Carax's decision in *Boy Meets Girl* to show his protagonist in the background, fascinated by the neck of the woman in the foreground (5.47).



5.48



5.49

5.48–5.49 The golden age of deep-focus cinematography. In the famous contract-signing scene from *Citizen Kane*, the entire depth composition is in sharp focus from one plane near the lens (Bernstein's head), through several planes in the middle ground, to the wall far in the distance (5.48). A similar example of deep-space staging combined with deep-focus cinematography is Anthony Mann's *The Tall Target* (5.49).

“If I made big-budget films, I would do what the filmmakers of twenty years ago did: use 35, 40, and 50mm [lenses] with lots of light so I could have that depth of field, because it plays upon the effect of surprise. It can give you a whole series of little tricks, little hiding places, little hooks in the image where you can hang surprises, places where they can suddenly appear, just like that, within the frame itself.”

—Benoît Jacquot, director, *A Single Girl*

On the problems of shooting in cars: “There are no new angles. They’ve all been done a thousand times, plus the mechanics of doing it are hideous. The camera car, the walkie-talkie, trying to keep it realistic-looking, the police motorcade that must accompany you—all of those things conspire to mar the intimacy of what you’re shooting. I think they had it right in old Hollywood where they would do it in the studio with rear-screen projection.”

—Alexander Payne, director of *The Descendants* and *Nebraska*



5.50

5.50–5.51 Deep focus in film and video. In *The Untouchables*, a conversation scene is played in the foreground while setting and distant figures are also kept in focus (5.50). This shot uses a special split-focus lens that can render extreme depth, but a comparable effect is more easily achieved in digital video, where a small chip can yield extreme depth of field. If this shot, from Agnès Varda’s *The Gleaners and I*, had been made on film, either Varda’s hand or the truck would have been far more out of focus (5.51).



5.51

even imitated in cartoons. (See 4.146.) During the 1970s and 1980s, younger directors like Steven Spielberg and Brian De Palma revived deep-focus cinematography (5.50). Early HD cameras had small sensors, which kept all planes in focus (5.51). As larger sensors were developed, cinematographers could more easily create selective, shallow-focus images.

Selective focus automatically steers our attention to a single important part of the shot. But deep focus tends to make several areas equally visible. So the filmmaker’s choice of deep focus creates another set of options for guiding our eye. Those options include sound (we tend to watch who’s speaking), elements of mise-en-scene, such as lighting and staging (p. 144), and aspects of framing and composition.

Just as a zoom lens lets the filmmaker change focal length while filming, focus can be altered within a shot by **racking focus**, or *pulling focus*. This is commonly used to switch our attention between foreground and background (5.52–5.53), making one plane blurred and another sharp.

Special Effects The image’s perspective relations can be shaped by **special effects**. The most unrealistic sort is **superimposition**. Here images are laid over one another, creating multiple perspectives within the frame. Superimpositions were originally created by double exposure either in the camera or in laboratory printing. For decades filmmakers presented dreams, visions, or memories superimposed over a character’s face (5.54). Today, as you’d expect, superimpositions are created in digital postproduction.

Filmmakers working for American and European studios in the 1920s and 1930s devised other ways of manipulating perspective relations. Suppose you want to shoot a piece of action in the studio but persuade the viewer that it’s taking place on location. The trick was to create a **composite**, in which separately photographed images are blended in a single composition.

One solution was to simply project footage of a setting onto a screen, then film actors in front of it. The whole ensemble could then be filmed from the front (5.55). This was called, logically enough, **rear projection** (or *process work*), and it was widely used. You’ll see it in many classic Hollywood films. When people are shown inside moving vehicles, the scenery whizzes by in rear projection. To modern eyes, older forms of rear projection don’t create very convincing depth cues (5.56).



5.52



5.53

5.52–5.53 Racking focus. In this shot from *Last Tango in Paris*, Jeanne, the bench, and the wall in the distance are in focus, while Tom in the foreground is not (5.52). After the camera racks focus, Tom becomes sharp and the background is blurred (5.53).



5.54 Superimposition. In the opening of Quentin Tarantino’s *Kill Bill, Vol. 1*, the Bride sees the first victim of her revenge, and her memory of a violent struggle is superimposed over a tight framing of her eyes.

A more complicated approach to composite filming, also developed in the classical studio system, was **matte work**. A **matte** is a portion of the setting photographed on a strip of film, usually with a part of the frame empty. Through laboratory printing, the matte is joined with another strip of film containing the actors. It was common to have expert artists paint an image of the setting, and the painting was then filmed, leaving a blank space in the frame. The footage was combined with footage of action, filmed to fit the blank area. Several long shots in *The Wizard of Oz* exemplify classic matte painting (2.22).

With a matte painting, the actor can’t move into the painted portions of the frame without seeming to disappear. To solve this problem, filmmakers used a **traveling matte**. Here the actor was photographed against a blank, usually blue, background. In laboratory printing, a background was prepared and a moving outline of the actor was cut out of it. Then the shot of the actor was jigsawed into the moving gap in the background footage. Traveling mattes could present persuasive images of space adventure or show cartoon characters interacting with humans (5.57, 5.58). Like any technique, however, traveling mattes can also generate a stylized, deliberately unrealistic image (5.59).

Now that filmmakers have software to do compositing, it might seem that rear projection and matte work are hopelessly outdated. But today’s digital techniques

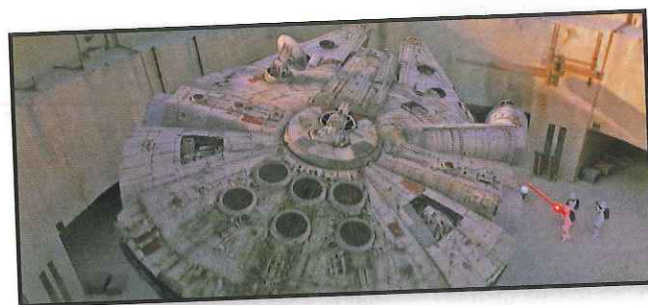


5.55



5.56

5.55–5.56 Movies inside movies. Behind the scenes (5.55): Rear projection for *Boom Town* (1940). In Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, the seascape in the rear plane was shot separately and used as a back-projected setting for an embrace filmed under studio lighting (5.56). From the 1920s through the 1950s, rear projection was easier than taking cast and crew on location.

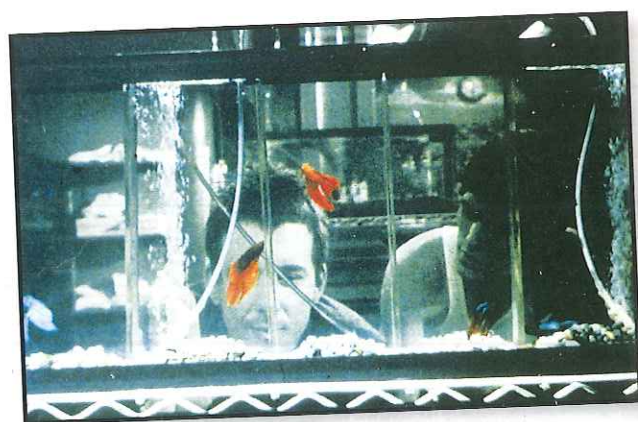


5.57

5.57–5.59 Traveling mattes. In *Star Wars: Episode IV—A New Hope*, the take-off of the *Millennium Falcon* was filmed as a model against a blue screen and matted into a shot of a building with imperial troopers firing upward (5.57). The animated figures in *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* were matted into live-action footage shot separately (5.58). For *Rumble Fish*, a black-and-white film, Francis Ford Coppola uses traveling mattes to color the fish in an aquarium—recalling early film's experiments with hand-coloring (5.59).



5.58



5.59

mimic the special effects created by analog cinematography and lab work. Rear projection is still used, although usually with digitally shot footage. Digital special effects still require that the action be shot in front of a screen, but now it's either blue or green. The backgrounds, often digital matte paintings, are added later, as in traditional compositing. Likewise, today's merging of several digital effects within a frame (5.60) resembles pre-digital practice. In *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *Blade*



5.60 Merging special effects. The digital composite from *The Fellowship of the Ring* integrates a partial but full-size set with an actor at the left, a miniature set in the middle ground, a matte painting of the background elements, and computer-animated waterfalls and falling leaves.

Runner, and other classic science fiction films, a single shot might include animated miniatures or models, traveling mattes to render their movements, and ray bursts added in superimposition—all against a matte-painted background.

Most filmmakers choose to present tonality, speed of motion, and perspective in realistic ways. Like other film techniques, though, photographic manipulations of the shot needn't be used for realism. For instance, most movie shots don't want to confuse you about the positions or sizes of the characters. But Chytilová's *Daisies* presents a comic optical illusion (5.61). Similarly, most CGI shots aim at a seamless integration that persuades us that we're seeing a realistic space. But in *The Mill & the Cross*, digital images of Brueghel's painting "The Way to Calvary" are stitched together with foreground scenes shot with actors (5.62). The result tricks our eye by combining painterly and filmic perspectives. Like mise-en-scene, visual perspective can be stylized, imaginative, and blatantly unrealistic if the filmmaker chooses that path. It all depends on how the stylistic choices function in the pattern of the overall film.

Framing

You're very aware of **framing** when you take a photo or shoot a video. You don't usually want to cut off people's heads. Like tonality, speed of motion, and perspective, framing is carefully considered by filmmakers of all sorts. It's one of the most powerful cinematographic techniques.

Framing was crucial for the first major filmmaker in history, Louis Lumière. An inventor and businessman, Lumière and his brother Auguste devised one of the first practical cinema cameras (5.63). The Lumière camera, the most flexible of its day, weighed only 12 pounds. This was the camera that Melies used for his cinematic trickery (p. 114), but Louis Lumière's earliest films presented simple events—workers leaving his father's factory, a game of cards, a family meal. But even at so early a stage of film history, Lumière was able to use framing to transform everyday reality into a cinematic event.

Consider one of the most famous Lumière films, *The Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat Station* (1897). Lumière might have framed the shot by setting the camera



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CGI can create spectacle, and some critics claim that the special effects make the story unimportant. We argue the opposite and talk about a film historian who agrees in "Classical cinema lives! New evidence for old norms."



5.61

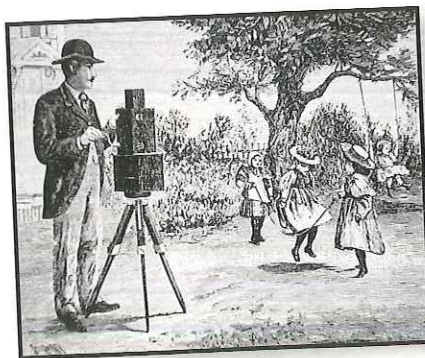
5.61–5.62 Playing with perspective. In *Daisies*, Vera Chytilová uses setting, character position, and deep focus to make a comic point about the two women's amused deflation of men (5.61). Lech Majewski's *The Mill and the Cross* combines the flat canvas with the real locations and figures in the foreground, inviting us into a world that is half-painting, half three-dimensional landscape (5.62).



5.62

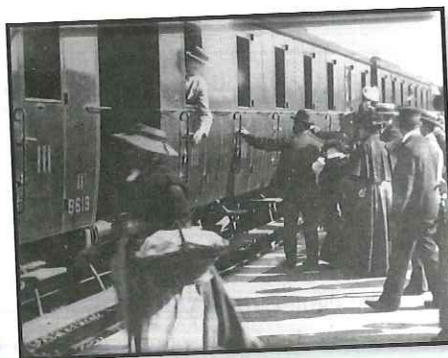
perpendicular to the platform, letting the train enter the frame from the right. Instead, Lumière stationed the camera at an oblique angle. The result is a dynamic composition, with the train arriving from the distance on a diagonal (5.64). If the scene had been shot perpendicularly, we would have seen only a string of passengers' backs climbing aboard. Lumière's oblique angle lets us see people's expressions and watch the ways they walk. There is also deep space: Some figures move into the foreground and others can be glimpsed in the distance.

Simple as it is, this single-shot film, less than a minute long, shows that camera position shapes the way we perceive the filmed event. The same thing happens on a more intimate scale with another Lumière short, *Baby's Meal* (1895). A long shot would have situated the family in its garden, perhaps showing off their wealth. Instead, Lumière framed the figures at a medium distance, which emphasizes the family's gestures and facial expressions (5.65). The frame's sizing of the event has guided our understanding of the event itself.



5.63

5.63–5.65 Louis Lumière, early master of framing. In an era in which a camera might be the size of an office desk, the Lumière camera was portable and could be set up on a tripod quickly (5.63). For *The Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat Station*, Lumière's diagonal camera was portable and could be set up on a tripod quickly (5.63). For *The Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat Station*, Lumière's diagonal camera was portable and could be set up on a tripod quickly (5.63). For *Baby's Meal* (5.65), the framing is more frontal and intimate, framing supplied a dynamic composition and considerable depth (5.64). For *Baby's Meal* (5.65), the framing is more frontal and intimate, excluding the garden in order to concentrate on the family.



5.64



5.65



A CLOSER LOOK

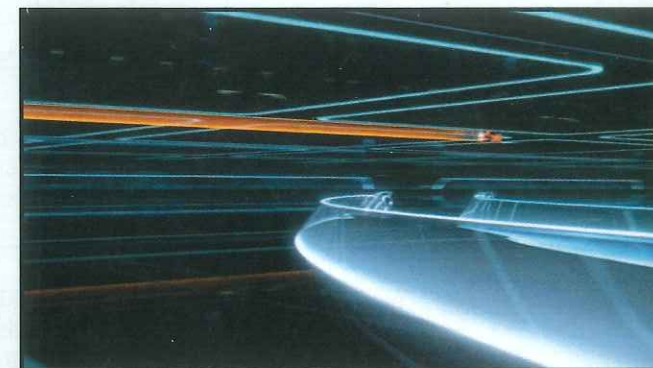
Virtual Perspective: 3D

Hold your index finger in front of your face. Close one eye, then open it and close the other. The finger shifts noticeably. That difference between each eye's perspective, aided by some brain work, helps you detect depth and volume in the world. But the ordinary camera lens presents a monocular—single-eyed—perspective on things. The result is a flat image, having only the dimensions of width and height. Since the beginning of cinema, some filmmakers have thought that if you could shoot scenes in ways that imitated the gap between our eyes, you could fool the viewer's brain into seeing convincing depth.

Filmmakers have created 3D imagery by shooting with two cameras, or with a single camera that has two lenses, or with a single lens that uses a beam-splitter to send the images to different cameras (5.66). In any case, what gets projected, as you know if you've ever peeped over your 3D glasses in the theater, is an image with two superimposed pictures. When you look through the glasses again, the two images merge.

For reasons still not fully understood, current 3D imagery typically lacks the volume and solidity of the real world. Nonetheless, we can still respond strongly to 3D moving pictures. When something thrusts out of the frame toward us, or when something glides into depth, the kinetic impact can be irresistible (5.67). Even movement into depth can be startling (5.68).

Stereoscopic filmmaking goes back to the beginnings of cinema, and it has never completely gone away. The first wave of theatrically successful 3D films came in the early 1950s, using two projectors and glasses with filters (red and green, or polarizing). Some people had trouble seeing the 3D effect and got headaches. The trend soon faded. Occasional 3D films, mostly in the exploitation



5.67



5.68

5.67–5.68 In your face and under the screen. The streaming wakes of the lightcycles float out into the auditorium in *Tron: Legacy* (5.67). At the climax of *House of Wax* (1953) the mad scientist's assistant pops up from the foreground (5.68). In 3D projection, he seems to rise up from the front row of the audience.



5.66 A 3D camera rig. James Cameron looks into a video viewfinder as he operates the camera system he helped invent for *Avatar*.

realm, were made in the years that followed. The introduction of Imax in 1985 revived the format for upscale audiences. The system used a high-resolution 70mm format, and the detail in the image helped minimize visual problems suffered by viewers. Most of the 3D Imax films were short documentaries, however, and projection utilized a complex dual-film system that commercial theaters could not afford to adopt.

The broadest resurgence of the format began in 2005, when the first digital 3D systems were installed and Disney released *Chicken Little*. Although the Imax dual-projection system could be employed for blockbuster releases like *The Dark Knight*, most theaters would need digital projection for 3D. The stereoscopic



A CLOSER LOOK

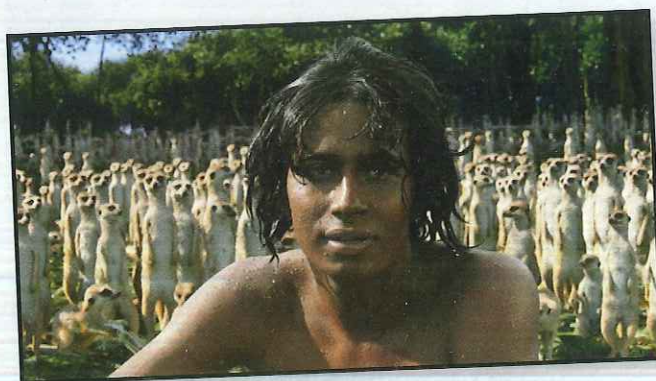
format helped studios convince theater chains to go digital. The fact that 3D screenings commanded higher ticket prices was also a persuasive factor.

Pushed by enthusiasts of the technology, notably James Cameron and DreamWorks Animation producer Jeffrey Katzenberg, thousands of 3D-capable theaters were equipped. Hollywood increased production of 3D films, usually animation and entries in the action, science fiction, and fantasy genres. More sophisticated glasses using various kinds of optical technology emerged, although exhibitors did not embrace a single standard.

The reemergence of 3D, although motivated by business concerns, created more artistic decisions for filmmakers. One option, popular at the outset, was to maximize deep focus. If all planes were clear and sharp, the 3D effect would be stronger. Maintaining such extreme depth of field was much easier in animation than in live-action filming. But uniformity of focus wasn't really necessary, and soon filmmakers returned to using shallower depth of field to guide the spectator's eye. *Coraline* experimented with soft foregrounds and shallow focus. Soon shallow focus became common in 3D films (5.69).

Filmmakers faced another choice. How should the depth be organized? Should 3D visuals burst out into the auditorium? Or should the frame be more like a window, inviting us into the realm beyond? Technically, the decision depends on setting the lenses' *convergence point*.

Again, if you hold your finger close to your face, your eyeballs pivot slightly inward to focus on it. Similarly, a 3D camera's lenses usually don't point directly forward along parallel lines. They are turned slightly inward, so their lines of sight converge, and like our eyes they can pivot at various angles. At the point where the lenses' fields of view converge, the



5.69 Out-of-focus 3D backgrounds. In *The Life of Pi*, the hero is in the foreground, in sharp focus. Behind him, a crowd of meerkats watches curiously. Compare 5.46 and 5.47.

two images will be perfectly aligned, with no ghostly doubling. If you take off your 3D glasses during a film, you will see objects onscreen that aren't doubled. These mark the convergence point, which defines the screen plane—essentially the “window” through which we look into the depth of the shot.

If the convergence point is set a short distance in front of the camera, say 5 feet, any action taking place beyond that distance will appear to recede into depth behind the screen. But if the cameras' lenses are set at a more distant convergence point, well into the depth of the space being filmed, that defines the screen plane as farther back. As a result, anything in front of the convergence point will seem to push out toward the viewer. The effect is sometimes called a “pop-out.”

The 1950s 3D movies exploited the pop-out option. Viewers were attacked by spears, arrows, lions, and even paddle balls. This effect was perceived as tacky and clichéd, and it helped hasten the end of the cycle. Aggressive 3D was revived to camp effect in the Paul Morrissey/Andy Warhol film *Flesh for Frankenstein* (1974), in which a spear jabs Dr. Frankenstein's inner organs toward the viewer's face.

The window-view alternative proved more popular in the digital era. Cinematographer Claudio Miranda, who shot *Tron: Legacy* in 3D, describes how this approach “makes the screen appear like a box you're looking into, and keeps things from leaping out unnaturally. Additionally, we went against the ‘rule’ of deep-focus depth-of-field for 3D and let our backgrounds go really soft, which helps guide the eye along with depth cues.” The filmmaker could accentuate the depth in the screen world by pulling back through space, letting new elements glide into the foreground.

Some films released in 3D have been shot in 2D (35mm or digital) and then converted with postproduction software. Although some viewers complained that the conversions weren't vivid enough, many directors and cinematographers felt that originating a film in 3D limited their choices. The production is time consuming, and the cameras are bulky.

Lighting raises particular problems. Sometimes the highlights on a face or object will be different for each eye. In addition, the audience sees the image as darker than it really is. “You are watching the movie through sunglasses, essentially,” says one cinematographer. As a result, putting filters on the camera lens reduces the illumination even more.

3D, like other areas of cinematography, opens up opportunities, but it also forces new decisions. The filmmaker must still choose according to larger purposes, and every choice may affect the form and style of the finished film.

Continued

Lumière's simple craftsmanship reminds us that the act of framing has many implications. The size and shape of the frame matter. For another, the frame defines onscreen and offscreen space. Framing also creates a vantage point, and that has a certain distance, angle, and height. And, in cinema, framing can move in relation to what it films. We'll look more closely at all these creative possibilities.

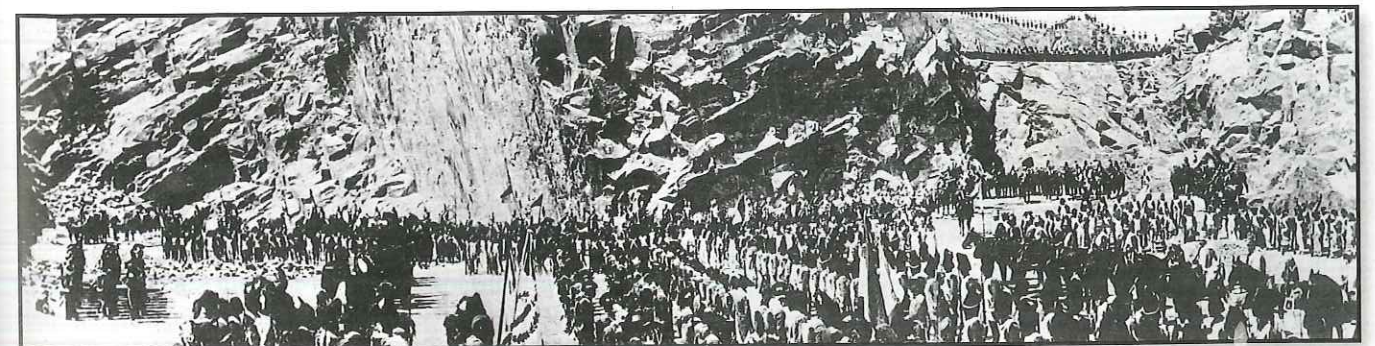
Frame Dimensions and Shape

Painters and still photographers can display images of any shape—ovals, triangles, diamond-shaped panels. Filmmakers are limited to a rectangle. But filmmakers can decide the width of that rectangle, and in some cases they can change the shape of the image inside it.

Aspect Ratios The ratio of frame width to frame height is called the **aspect ratio**. For example, an image that is twice as wide as it is high is said to be in a 2:1 ratio. Thomas Edison, Lumière, and other early film inventors set the proportions at approximately four by three, yielding an aspect ratio of 1.33:1. In the silent era, there wasn't complete uniformity about this, and some filmmakers chose to experiment with ratios. Experiments with *widescreen* formats began quite early. Abel Gance shot and projected sequences of *Napoleon* (1927) in what he called *trptychs* (5.70). In contrast, the Soviet director Sergei Eisenstein argued for a square frame, which would make compositions along horizontal, vertical, and diagonal directions equally feasible. A 2014 feature, *Mommy*, put Eisenstein's idea into practice.

Synchronized sound technology in the late 1920s demanded more standardized aspect ratios. Adding the sound track to the film strip required adjusting the shape of the image. At first, some films were printed in an almost square format, usually about 1.17:1 (5.71). But in the early 1930s, the Hollywood Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences established the so-called **Academy ratio** of 1.37:1. This modified the classic 1.33:1 format to allow room for a soundtrack (5.72). The Academy ratio of 1.37:1 was widely employed throughout the world until the mid-1950s, when a 1.85:1 ratio became one norm. Since then, a great many widescreen ratios have appeared in 35mm and digital filmmaking; the most common ones are reviewed in 5.73–5.77.

The simplest way to create a widescreen image is by **masking** it at some stage in production or exhibition (5.78). This masking is usually called a *hard matte*. Alternatively, many contemporary films are shot full-frame (that is, between 1.37:1 and 1.17:1) in the expectation that they will be masked when the film is shown in theaters or transferred to video. Sometimes the full-frame option results in lights or sound equipment being visible on the film strip (5.79). Another way to create a widescreen image is by using an **anamorphic** process. Here a special lens squeezes the image horizontally, either during filming or in printing. The projectionist uses a comparable lens to unsqueeze the image during projection (5.80, 5.81).



5.70 Early widescreen. A panoramic view from *Napoleon* joins images shot with three cameras. Gance used the effect to show a single huge expanse or to put different images side by side.



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Can framings create humor? We show how they can in “Funny framings.” “You are my density” traces how directors can fill the frame with information.



5.71 Aspect ratio 1.17:1—early sound films. The frame from *Public Enemy* shows the squarish ratio of some early sound films.



5.72 Aspect ratio 1.37:1—Academy ratio. The frame from *The Rules of the Game* shows the standardized ratio used until the mid-1950s.



5.73 Aspect ratio 1.85:1—common North American ratio. The example here is from *Me and You and Everyone We Know*.



5.75 Aspect ratio 1.75:1—common European ratio. This ratio fits widescreen television monitors (16 × 9) and many digital-video formats. Shown here is *Last Tango in Paris*.



5.76 Aspect ratio 2.35:1—anamorphic widescreen. This frame from *The Valiant Ones* shows the ratio standardized in the 1950s for the CinemaScope anamorphic process.



5.77 Aspect ratio 2.2:1—70mm widescreen. *Ghostbusters* displays the ratio that was chiefly used for 70mm presentation.



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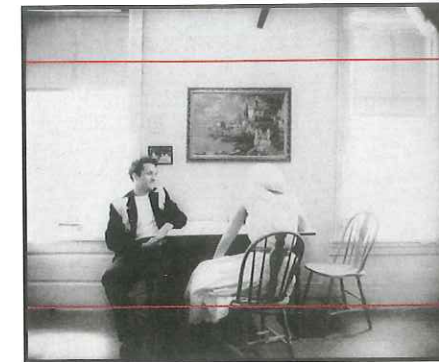
The Grand Budapest Hotel employs several aspect ratios. We consider the consequences of this for the director's style in "Wes Anderson takes the 4:3 challenge."

5.74 Aspect ratio 1.66:1—common European ratio. Also found in digital video productions, this ratio is shown here in a frame from *Une chambre en ville*.

5.78–5.79 Masking before and during projection. Agnès Varda's *Vagabond* was masked during filming or printing (5.78). The full-frame image from Martin Scorsese's *Raging Bull* (5.79) includes a microphone at the top edge. This would not be seen in the theater, because the top and bottom of the frame would be masked in the projector. The colored lines in our illustration show a projection framing at 1.85:1.



5.78



5.79



5.80



5.81

5.80–5.81 Anamorphic widescreen. A frame from Nagisa Oshima's anamorphic film *Boy*, as squeezed on the original film strip (5.80). The same frame, unsqueezed as it would be in projection (5.81). The anamorphic aspect ratio established by CinemaScope was 2.35:1 until the 1970s; for technical reasons, it was adjusted to 2.40:1. This is the aspect ratio of Panavision, today's most frequently used anamorphic system.

CREATIVE DECISIONS

Using Widescreen Framing

The practiced filmmaker knows that widescreen cinema, either masked or anamorphic, creates a different visual impact than the 1.37 ratio. The screen becomes a band or strip, emphasizing horizontal compositions. By offering more image area, a widescreen format offers bigger challenges about guiding attention than does the 1.37 ratio. How do you compose for it? Can you achieve the tight packing you can get in the narrower frame?

As you'd expect, filmmakers initially thought the format ideal for the sweep and spectacle of Westerns, travelogues, musicals, and historical epics. But what about ordinary dramatic conversations and more intimate encounters? A common solution today is to fill the frame with a face (p. 46). This choice will in turn require the director to cut up the scene more, as we'll see in the next chapter. For more distant shots, the director is likely to put the important information off center, so that the viewer can concentrate on that (5.82, 5.83).

The wide formats challenge ambitious directors to design more screen-filling compositions. Those can't be as compact as the deep-focus compositions of the 1940s (5.48, 5.49), but they can achieve pictorial force. For example, the wide



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We trace the artistic options available in early CinemaScope in "Scoping things out: A new video lecture." For an Asian comparison, there's "Another Shaw production: Anamorphic adventures in Hong Kong."



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The subtleties of emphasis that can be achieved with anamorphic widescreen framings are discussed in "Gradation of emphasis, starring Glenn Ford."

5.82–5.83 Spacing out the wide frame. Souleymane Cissé's *Yeelen* frames its hero in a slightly off-center position (5.82), a common choice in widescreen compositions. More extreme is the confrontation in John McTiernan's *Die Hard*, with the points of interest thrust to the left half of the frame (5.83). Off-center framings like these suggest action taking place offscreen, with the empty areas shaping our expectations about the next shot (see 6.19–6.20).



5.82



5.83



5.84

5.84–5.85 Widescreen for dense composition. Akira Kurosawa's *Sanjuro* uses the anamorphic process of Tohoscope, a Japanese equivalent of CinemaScope, to create a dense deep-focus composition (5.84). The busy scene from *Chunhyang* (5.85) fills the frame with bustle and glances. Director Im Kwon-Taek guides our attention around the wide frame according to who is speaking, who is facing us, and who reacts to the speaker.



5.85

format may build up significant depth, even in a confined setting (5.84). Or the director may multiply points of interest within the frame. This requires care in staging and timing the actors' performances (5.85).

Masks and Multiple Images The rectangular frame hasn't prevented some filmmakers from embedding other image shapes in it. This has usually been done by attaching **masks** over either the camera's or the printer's lens to block the



5.86



5.87



5.88

5.86–5.88 Changing compositional shape. In *La Roue*, Gance employs a variety of circular and oval masks (5.86). In one shot of Griffith's *Intolerance*, most of the frame is boldly blocked out to leave only a thin vertical slice, emphasizing the soldier's fall from the rampart (5.87). Orson Welles used an iris to close a scene in *The Magnificent Ambersons* (5.88). The old-fashioned device adds a nostalgic note to the sequence, the last moment of shared happiness among the characters.

passage of light. Masks were quite common in the silent cinema (5.86, 5.87). A moving circular mask that opens to reveal or closes to conceal a scene is called an **iris**. A number of directors in the sound cinema have revived the use of irises and masks (5.88).

We also should mention experiments with *multiple-frame*, or *split-screen*, imagery. In this process, two or more images, each with its own frame dimensions and shape, appear within the larger frame. Gance's *Napoleon* tried it on an epic scale (5.70), but it was used earlier, often to present scenes of telephone conversations. Modern filmmakers have turned to multiple-frame imagery to build suspense; we gain a godlike omniscience as we watch different story actions at exactly the same moment (5.89). The technique can be used subjectively as well (5.90).

Choices about aspect ratio and embedded imagery shape the spectator's experience in important ways. Graphic factors such as masses, edges, and movement gain their impact in relation to frame width. Just as important, frame size and shape guide the spectator's eye. The filmmaker can concentrate our attention through masking or composition, or shift our attention across the frame by creating different points of interest. The same possibilities exist with multiple-frame imagery, which must be carefully coordinated either to focus the viewer's attention or to send it ricocheting from one image to another.

Onscreen and Offscreen Space

Whatever its shape, the frame limits the image with a boundary. Our eyes have a very wide field of view, somewhat over 180 degrees, but a camera lens shows a much smaller slice of the world. Is this a disadvantage?

No. The frame shapes our experience, calling attention to what the filmmaker wants us to see. Every act of framing, as Lumière intuitively realized, creates relationships among the things we see. In Figure 5.64, the train forms a diagonal, and the people move toward us. Framing the scene differently would have created different visual patterns, different relationships between the train and the travelers. Moreover,



5.89



5.90

5.89–5.90 Multiple-frame imagery. Split-screen shots often present two or more events taking place at the same time. The opening sequence of *The Thomas Crown Affair* (1968) shows men converging to commit a robbery (5.89). In *127 Hours*, the hero is trapped in a remote canyon, and Danny Boyle uses multiple frames to convey his perceptions and imaginings (5.90).

the fact that the frame carves out only a little from the overall visual field means that filmmakers can creatively exploit the space *offscreen*, the areas not shown inside the frame.

As viewers we help the filmmaker with this task, because we know that what's in the frame is part of a continuous world. If the camera moves away from a person to show someone else, we assume that the first person is still there, outside the frame. Even in an abstract film, we can't resist the sense that the shapes and patterns that burst into the frame come from somewhere. So the filmmaker can imply the presence of things out of frame. You can have a character look or gesture at something offscreen. As we'll see in Chapter 7, sound can offer potent clues about offscreen space. And something from offscreen can come into the frame.

We're most aware of offscreen space when it creates suspense or surprise. A shadow from an unknown person outside the frame may slide across the shot and build up our expectations of a threat. Likewise, moments when a monster bursts into the frame are conventional in horror films, as we've seen in the 3D *House of Wax* (5.68). But any genre can employ incursions from offscreen. During a party scene in *Jezebel*, the heroine is the main focus of attention until a man's hand comes abruptly into the frame (5.91–5.94). Director William Wyler has used the selective powers of the frame to exclude something of great importance and then introduce it with startling effect. More systematically, D. W. Griffith's *Musketeers of Pig Alley* makes use of sudden intrusions into the frame as a motif developing across the whole film (5.95, 5.96).

These examples exploit areas lying beyond the four frame edges. There's also offscreen space behind parts of the setting, as when we see a mysterious door and hear sounds from inside it. The filmmaker can activate yet another offscreen zone, that of the camera and the area around it. In a thriller, a moving camera may represent the optical viewpoint of a stalker who isn't shown directly. The zone around the camera is used more imaginatively in Abbas Kiarostami's *Through the*

5.91–5.94 Offscreen space revealed. In *Jezebel*, the heroine, Julie, greets some friends in medium shot (5.91). Suddenly a fist holding a glass appears in the left foreground (5.92). Julie notices and comes forward flirtatiously (5.93), and the camera retreats slightly to frame her with the man who toasted her (5.94). It's an attention-getting way to introduce Julie's new suitor.



5.91



5.92



5.93



5.94



5.95



5.96



5.97



5.99



5.98

5.97–5.99 The space behind the camera. In *Through the Olive Trees*, we watch as the actors redo the scene (5.97). Eventually, shots begin to show the director and his crew behind the camera (5.98). After several repetitions, the director walks in from behind the camera and tries to resolve the problem (5.99).

Olive Trees. A film crew is shooting a scene, and we watch through the lens of the camera (5.97–5.99). As the conflicts between two young actors spoil take after take, we watch tensely, knowing that behind the camera the crew is getting more and more frustrated. Filmmakers are well aware that we need only a few hints to start imagining things taking place outside the frame.

Camera Position: Angle, Level, Height, and Distance of Framing

When Louis Lumière decided to frame the train from an oblique angle and to present his family at breakfast in a fairly close setup (5.64, 5.65), he was doing what everyone with a camera does. He made decisions about camera position. In an animated film, there may not be an actual camera used in production, as with

5.95–5.96 Offscreen space as motif. *The Musketeers of Pig Alley*: A gangster is trying to slip a drug into the heroine's drink. We're not aware that her friend, the Snapper Kid, is watching until a plume of his cigarette smoke wafts into the frame (5.95). At the film's end, when the Snapper Kid receives a payoff, a mysterious hand thrusts into the frame to offer him money (5.96).



5.100



5.102



5.101

5.100–5.102 Types of camera angle. A straight-on angle in *The Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach* (5.100). In this shot from *Family Plot* (5.101), a high-angle framing shows an investigator trailing a suspect as she leaves a funeral. A low-angle view places sailors and a machine gun against the sky in *They Were Expendable* (5.102).

drawing on film or software-based animation. Even in animation, though, the framing implies that the shot is viewed from a certain spot in space.

Angle The frame positions us at some *angle* on the subject. The filmmaker faces a huge number of choices here, but we can say roughly that the framing can present a straight-on angle, a high angle, or the low angle. You're familiar with these from taking photos and videos (5.100–5.102).

Level The frame can be more or less level—that is, parallel to the horizon. If the framing is tipped to one side or the other, it's said to be **canted**. Canted framing (also called a “Dutch angle”) is relatively rare, although a few films make heavy use of it, such as Orson Welles's *Mr. Arkadin*, Carol Reed's *The Third Man*, and Wong Kar-wai's *Fallen Angels* (5.103). It can create rather disruptive effects (5.104).



5.103

5.103–5.104 The tipped camera. A canted framing in *Fallen Angels* (5.103). In Christopher Maclaine's *The End*, a canted framing makes a steep street in the foreground appear level and tips the houses in the background (5.104).



5.104

Height We may not think as much about camera height as we do angle and horizontal balance, but it's another area of choice for the filmmaker. Height is related to camera angle, since some angles demand that you position the camera higher or lower than the subject. But if the angle is kept straight in, crouching to take a snapshot creates a different composition than taking it from eye level. For instance, the Japanese filmmaker Yasujiro Ozu films from a low height but uses a straight-on angle (4.155, 6.142–6.145). This choice gives his shots a distinctive visual style.

Distance The framing of the image stations us relatively close to the subject or farther away. This aspect of framing is usually called *camera distance*. The terms for camera distance are approximate, and they're usually derived from the scale of human bodies in the shot. Our examples are all from *The Third Man*.

In the **extreme long shot**, the human figure is lost or tiny (5.105). This is the framing for landscapes, bird's-eye views of cities, and other vistas. In the **long shot**, figures are more prominent, but the background still dominates (5.106). Shots in which the human figure is framed from about the knees up are called **medium long shots** (5.107). These are common, since they permit a nice balance of figure and surroundings.

The **medium shot** frames the human body from the waist up (5.108). Gesture and expression now become more visible. The **medium close-up** frames the body from the chest up (5.109). The **close-up** is traditionally the shot showing just the head, hands, feet, or a small object. It emphasizes facial expression, the details of a gesture, or a significant object (5.110). The **extreme close-up** singles out a portion of the face or isolates and magnifies an object (5.111).



5.105 Extreme long shot



5.106 Long shot



5.107 Medium long shot



5.108 Medium shot



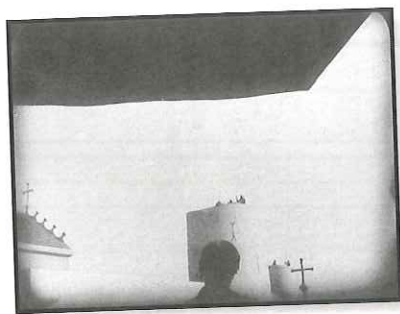
5.109 Medium close-up



5.110 Close-up



5.111 Extreme close-up



5.112 Shot scale versus camera position. In *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc*, the framing is that of a rather long shot even though Jeanne's head is all we see of her. If the framing were simply adjusted downward, her whole body would be visible, along with much of the castle.



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Even a simple framing can subtly shape the viewer's response, as we argue in "Where did the two-shot go? Here."

Note that the size of the photographed material within the frame is as important as any real camera distance. From the same camera distance, you could film a long shot of a person or a close-up of King Kong's elbow. We would not call the shot in **5.112** (from *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc*) a close-up just because only Jeanne's head appears in the frame. In judging camera distance, the relative scale of the view determines how we label the shot.

Categories of framing are obviously matters of degree. No precise cutoff point distinguishes between a long shot and an extreme long shot. Filmmakers and film researchers find these terms useful, and they're usually clear enough for descriptive purposes.

Functions of Framing Sometimes we're tempted to assign absolute meanings to angles, distances, and other qualities of framing. Does filming from a low angle automatically present a character as dwarfed and defeated? Verbal analogies are especially seductive. Does a canted frame mean that "the world is out of kilter"?

Making and watching movies would be a lot simpler if framings carried such hard-and-fast meanings. But the individual films would lose their uniqueness and richness. In fact, framings don't carry absolute or general meanings. In *some* films, angles and distance imply the meanings mentioned above, but in other films—probably most films—they don't. To rely on formulas is to forget that meaning and effect always stem from the film's overall form and the immediate context.

For instance, at many points in *Citizen Kane*, low-angle shots of Kane do suggest his looming power. Interestingly, however, the film's lowest camera positions occur at the point of Kane's most humiliating defeat—his miscarried gubernatorial campaign (**5.113**). Here the low angle functions to isolate Kane and Leland. Similarly, the world is hardly out of kilter in the shot from Eisenstein's *October* shown in **5.114**. The canted frame dynamizes the effort of pushing the cannon. If the cliché about high-angle framings were correct, **5.115**, a shot from *North by Northwest*, would express the powerlessness of Van Damm and Leonard. In fact, the angle of Hitchcock's shot wittily prophesies how they plan to carry out a murder.

These three examples indicate that we can't reduce the richness of cinema to a few recipes. We must, as usual, look for the *functions* the technique performs in the particular *context* of the total film.



5.113



5.114



5.115

5.113–5.115 Context controls framing. In *Citizen Kane*, the protagonist is seen from below during his greatest defeat. By setting the figures against the ceiling and an abandoned campaign headquarters, the low angle suggests that Kane is increasingly isolated (**5.113**). A canted framing, as in Eisenstein's *October*, can create a dynamic composition and suggest a powerful force moving against gravity (**5.114**). In *North by Northwest*, as Van Damm reflects on pushing his mistress out of a plane, and the camera rises above him, he says, "I think that this is a matter best disposed of from a great height" (**5.115**).

CREATIVE DECISIONS

Camera Position in a Shot from *The Social Network*

One of the most important matters a director decides is the placement of the camera. "There's only one right spot for the camera in each shot," the adage goes, "and it's my job to find it."

Consider a shot from *The Social Network*. Throughout the film Mark Zuckerberg has been characterized as a driven hacker. We've seen that his scowling face can seem aggressive, especially in contrast to that of his friend Eduardo (4.94–4.97). Mark's rare smiles are somewhat twisted and self-regarding. But at the moment when he has just auditioned new programmers for Facebook, he seems to wear a grin of genuine joy.

Instead of supplying a close-up of this expression, though, director David Fincher frames Mark in long shot (**5.116**). This is consistent with the narrational weight of the scene, as our range of knowledge has been restricted to Eduardo's. But the camera position also cools down any admiration we might be feeling for Mark. A closer view might have made him more sympathetic.



5.116 Camera distance and sympathy. There are plenty of close shots of Mark elsewhere in *The Social Network*. Yet at his moment of triumph, the framing (from Eduardo's optical point of view) plays down an expression that could humanize him a bit. Perhaps the somber lighting, not shared with the background characters, even gives his smile a sinister edge.

For filmmakers working with narrative form, camera placement is central to visual storytelling. A framing can stress a narratively important detail (**5.117**, **5.118**). Camera distance specifies where characters are and how they respond to each other. Orchestrated by editing, as we'll see in the next chapter, distances and angles form patterns that guide us in building up the story.

Framing also can put us in a character's place. In Chapter 3, we saw that a film's narration may present story information with some psychological depth (p. 90). One option is perceptual subjectivity, the attempt to render what a character sees or hears. A shot's distance and angle may prompt us to take it as seen through a character's eyes, creating a *point-of-view* (POV) shot (**5.119**, **5.120**). (See also p. 90.)

"I don't like close-ups unless you can get a kick out of them, unless you need them. If you can get away with attitudes and positions that show the feeling of the scene, I think you're better off using the close-up only for absolute punctuation—that's the reason you do it. And you save it—not like TV where they do everything in close-up."

—Howard Hawks, director, *His Girl Friday*

5.117–5.118 Camera distance as emphasis. The tears of Henriette in *A Day in the Country* are visible in extreme close-up (5.117). In *Day for Night*, a close framing emphasizes how carefully the film director arranges an actor's hands (5.118).



5.117



5.118

5.119–5.120 Subjective framings. In *Fury*, the hero in his jail cell is seen through the bars from a slightly low angle (5.119). The next shot, a high angle through the window toward the street outside, shows us what he sees, from his point of view (5.120).



5.119



5.120



5.121 Camera angle as a motif. In *The Maltese Falcon*, Kasper Gutman is frequently photographed from a low angle, emphasizing his obesity.

Framings may serve the narrative in yet other ways. Across an entire film, the repetitions of certain framings may associate themselves with a character or situation. That is, framings may become motifs unifying the film (5.121). Alternatively, certain framings in a film may stand out by virtue of their rarity. In a film composed primarily of long shots and medium shots, an extreme close-up will have considerable force. The early scenes of Ridley Scott's *Alien* present few shots depicting any character's point of view. But when Kane approaches the alien egg, we see close views of it as if through his eyes, and the creature leaps straight out at us. The POV shot provides a sudden shock and marks a major turning point in the plot.

Apart from their narrative significance, framings can add a visual interest of their own. Close-ups can give hands and feet a weight they wouldn't have if we were just attending to dialogue and facial expression (5.122). Long shots can permit us to explore vistas. Much of the visual delight of Westerns, of David Lynch's *The Straight Story*, and other films rendering landscapes arises from long shots that make huge spaces manifest (5.123). By including a range of information, the long-shot framing encourages us to search for details or discover abstract patterns (5.124).

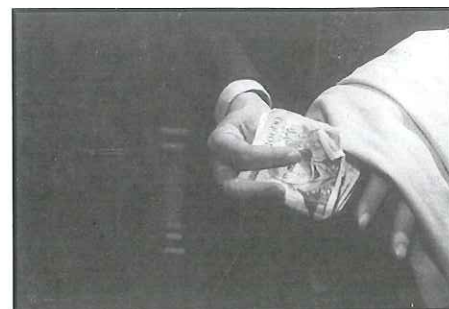
In both narrative and nonnarrative films, our eye also enjoys the formal play presented by unusual angles on familiar objects (5.125, 5.126). "By reproducing the object from an unusual and striking angle," writes Rudolf Arnheim, "the artist forces the spectator to take a keener interest, which goes beyond mere noticing or acceptance. The object thus photographed sometimes gains in reality, and the impression it makes is livelier and more arresting."

The filmmaker may find ways to use framing for comic effect. You'll recall that in *Our Hospitality* Keaton stages many gags in depth. Now we can see that well-chosen camera angles and distances are also vital to the gags' success. If you turn back to p. 156, you'll notice that the railroad scene shown in 4.175 couldn't



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One way to add visual interest is to shoot straight into the rear plane of the setting, as we explain in "Shot-consciousness" and "VIFF 2013 finale: The bold and the beautiful, sometimes together."



5.122

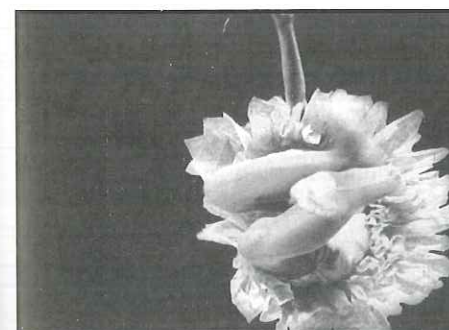


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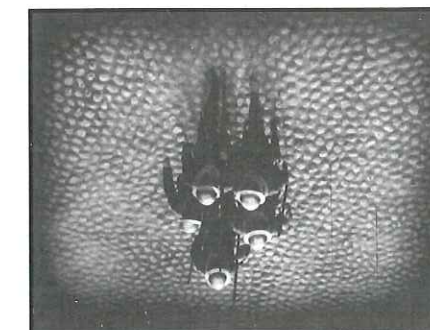
5.122–5.124 Camera distance for intricacy and scope. The close shots of thieves' surreptitious gestures have a narrative function in Robert Bresson's *Pickpocket*, but they also create a dazzling ballet of fingers and wrists (5.122). Helicopter shots in *Lessons of Darkness* give the desolate burning oilfields of Kuwait an eerie, horrifying grandeur (5.123). In Hou Hsiao-hsien's *Summer at Grandpa's*, the boy from the city visits his disgraced uncle, and the neighborhood is presented as a welter of rooftops sheltering a spot of bright red (5.124).



5.124



5.125



5.126

5.125–5.126 Seeing differently. René Clair in *Entr'acte* frames a ballerina from straight below, transforming the figure into a pulsating flower (5.125). In *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc*, the upside-down framings are not motivated as a character's point of view; they build up to the frenzy of the soldiers' massacre of the crowd witnessing Jeanne's death (5.126).

be as effective if it were filmed from the side and in extreme long shot. That way, we wouldn't clearly see that the two parts of the train are on parallel tracks. And we wouldn't see the engineer's unconcerned posture, which indicates his failure to realize what has happened. Like Lumière at the train station, Keaton chose depth staging and a diagonal camera position. The result creates a composition that highlights certain relations between things.

Similarly, offscreen space is vital to the gag shown in 4.184–4.186. Here Keaton lays out the comedy in time rather than space. Willie tugs on the rope.



5.127 Framing creates a visual joke. In *Play Time*, M. Hulot reacts with a start when he notices that a guard locking a door seems suddenly to have sprouted horns—the door handles.

Then an unseen effect of that tug becomes visible as the Canfield son hurtles past and disappears. Finally, Willie reacts and is dragged down into the abyss below the frameline. Keaton could have framed this moment in a different way—say, from a low angle that showed both Willie and the Canfield boy in the same frame. But that would have sacrificed the suspense of waiting for Canfield to plummet through the shot. Throughout *Our Hospitality* our reaction to Keaton's humor depends on his careful combination of mise-en-scene and framing.

In Tati's *Play Time*, mise-en-scene and camera position cooperate to create pictorial jokes. In **5.127**, a visual pun issues from the precisely chosen camera angle and distance, as well as from the mise-en-scene: the man's stooping posture and the door handles make him look like a goat. Tati maintained the approach of silent comedy within the sound cinema. As with other filmmakers, his choice of framing was governed by imagining how it would affect the viewer.

The Mobile Frame

Cinema isn't the only visual medium that employs framing. Photographs, paintings, and comic-book panels have aspect ratios, imply things happening outside the frame, and present an implied vantage point on the scene. But there is one resource of framing that is specific to films, either photochemical or digital. In cinema, the frame can *move* with respect to what it shows us.

In cinematography, *mobile framing* allows the filmmaker to change the camera angle, level, height, or distance *during* the shot. Just as important, the movement of the frame often persuades us that we're moving too.

Types of Mobile Framing We usually refer to the ability of the frame to be mobile as *camera movement*. In live-action filming, mobile framing is usually achieved by moving the camera physically during production. There are several kinds of camera movement, each with a specific effect onscreen.

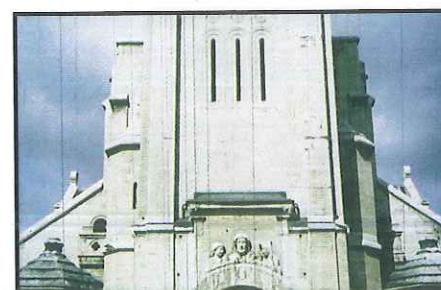
The **pan** (short for *panorama*) movement swivels the camera on a vertical axis. The camera as a whole does not move to a new position. Onscreen, the pan scans space horizontally, as if the camera is "turning its head" right or left (**5.128, 5.129**). The **tilt** movement rotates the camera on a horizontal axis. It is as if the camera's head were swiveling up or down. Onscreen, the tilt movement yields the impression of unrolling a space from top to bottom or bottom to top (**5.130, 5.131**).



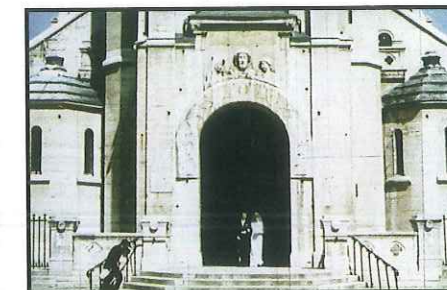
5.128



5.129



5.130

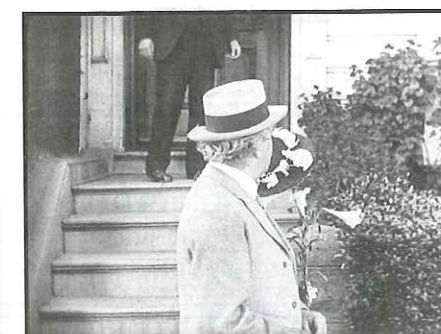


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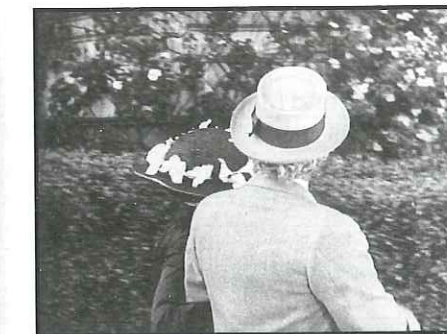
5.128–5.131 Panning and tilting the camera. During a shot in Dreyer's *Ordet*, the camera pans right to keep the figures in frame as they cross a room (**5.128, 5.129**). François Truffaut's *The Bride Wore Black* begins with a tilt down a church spire to the church door (**5.130, 5.131**).

In the **tracking** or **dolly shot**, the camera as a whole changes position, traveling in any direction along the ground—forward, backward, diagonally, in circles, or from side to side (**5.132, 5.133**). In the **crane shot**, the camera moves above ground level. Typically, it rises or descends, often thanks to a mechanical arm that lifts and lowers it. A crane shot may move vertically, like an elevator (**5.134, 5.135**), or at some angle forward or back (**5.136, 5.137**). Variations of the crane shot are helicopter and airplane shots as well as shots captured by drone aircraft.

Sometimes the camera movement we see is simulated—that is, no camera actually moved in production. The main examples are seen in animation. With cel animation, which photographs one frame at a time, the actual camera stays in one



5.132



5.133

5.132–5.133 The camera moves through space. During this lateral tracking shot in Erich von Stroheim's *Greedy*, the camera moves rightward along with the two characters (**5.132, 5.133**). Note how the figures remain in the same basic relationship to the frame as they stroll along a sidewalk, while the front of the house that they hope to buy remains visible behind them.



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We analyze subtleties of framing in films by two masters, William Wyler and Kenji Mizoguchi, in "Sleeves."



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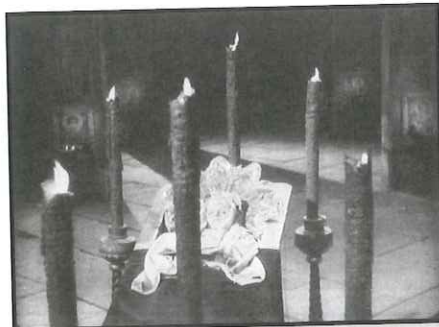
A very simple tilt can powerfully reveal a new story element, as we discuss in "Sometimes a Reframing . . ."

<http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2015/09/01/sometimes-a-reframing/>

"I realized that if I could just get to the really good scripts, I could approach it the way I approach literature—why the camera moves this way because of this motif—and then it became fascinating."

—Jodie Foster, director, *Little Man Tate*

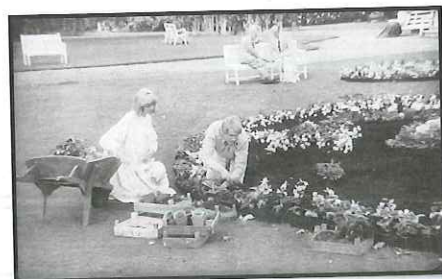
5.134–5.137 Craning down, craning up. In *Ivan the Terrible*, from a high-angle view of Anastasia's bier (5.134), the camera descends to end on a straight-on framing of Ivan slumped at its base (5.135). At the end of Karel Reisz's *Morgan!* the camera cranes diagonally up and back to reveal that the hero's apparently innocuous flower garden proclaims his Communist sympathies (5.136, 5.137).



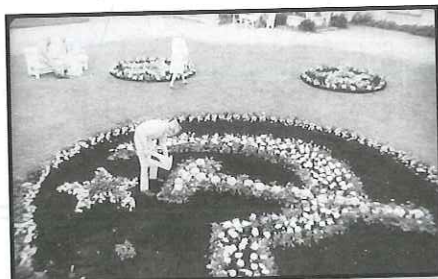
5.134



5.135



5.136



5.137



5.138



5.139



5.140

5.138–5.140 Frame mobility without a moving camera. In *Peter Pan* cel animation imitates a pan shot.

“It’s a compulsion of mine to move the camera, and I now know why. It enhances three-dimensionality. It puts you in the space, and if you move the camera the audience becomes aware of the space.”

—George Miller, director, *The Road Warrior*

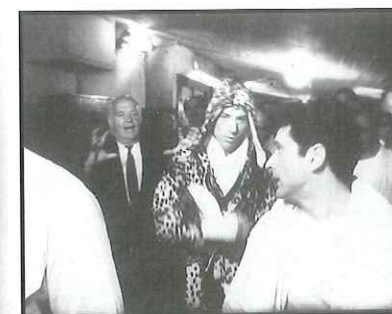
position. With computer animation, there is no camera to speak of: Its vantage point is constructed through software. Nonetheless, an animation shot can mimic a camera movement (5.138–5.140).

Movement and Machinery For many decades, camera movements in live-action production depended on putting the camera on a **dolly**, a heavy cart. The dolly can usually move on its own wheels, but it is often mounted on rails, hence the term **tracking** (5.141). Tracking shots are also made with cranes, even if the camera position doesn’t rise or fall as in the usual crane shot. Suspended from a jib arm, the camera can glide over rough terrain. *The Thin Red Line* employed a 72-foot crane arm that let the camera slither over hills of tall grass during battle scenes. “The whole idea of using that crane was to not make it feel like a crane,” says cinematographer John Toll. “We wanted it to look like the most continuous, smooth dolly that had ever been built.”

Body-mounted camera units are common as well. These devices allow the camera operator to steer the camera while walking (see 1.21). Servo mechanisms adjust for imbalances and jerkiness, so the camera seems to glide or float. The prototype of the body-worn camera stabilizer is the Steadicam, initially used on



5.141 Tracking on rails. The camera crew must push the dolly on the tracks to capture the shot. (Compare 1.36.) The 360° tracking shot has become a common technique in modern cinema. The shot, being prepared for *The Departed*, was omitted from the final film.



5.142



5.143

5.142–5.143 Steadicam tracking shot. In Martin Scorsese’s *Raging Bull*, the Steadicam follows the protagonist out of his dressing room and through a crowd up to the boxing ring.

Bound for Glory, *Rocky*, and *The Shining*. Now many consumer video cameras have comparable image-stabilization systems.

A body-worn camera can go places that a dolly can’t. The operator can smoothly follow actors climbing stairs, riding vehicles, and walking great distances (5.142, 5.143). Some directors have taken advantage of the Steadicam to create lengthy shots moving through many locales, as in the opening scenes of Brian De Palma’s *Bonfire of the Vanities* and Paul Thomas Anderson’s *Boogie Nights*.

Sometimes the filmmaker does not want smooth camera movements and prefers a bumpy image. Commonly, this sort of shot is created by the **handheld camera**. Instead of anchoring the camera on some support like a dolly or a stabilizer, the operator simply walks with the camera braced on the shoulder. This sort of camera movement became common in the late 1950s, with the growth of the *cinéma vérité* documentary trend (5.144, 5.145).



5.144



5.145

5.144–5.145 The handheld camera and documentary. Don Pennebaker hand-holds the camera while filming his *Keep on Rockin'* (5.144). For the documentary *Primary*, a cameraman lifted the camera above his head and followed John F. Kennedy through a milling crowd (5.145).



5.146 Other camera supports. In *Leviathan*, a light GoPro camera, lashed to a pole, plunges into the sea and turns upward, yielding an eerie vision of gulls coming to feed on the netted fish.

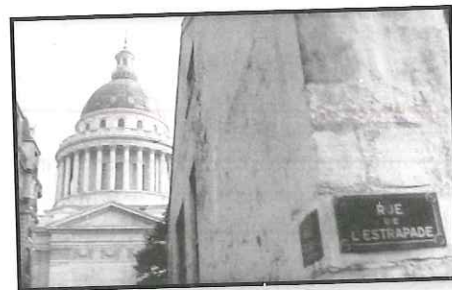
Lightweight digital cameras allow cinematographers to create unusual camera mounts. For the race scenes of *Secretariat*, a miniature camera was attached to the end of a broomstick. GoPro cameras are usually used for sports recording, but in the poetic documentary *Leviathan* they convey unusual views of life on a commercial fishing boat. Some cameras were attached to the fishermen's helmets, while others were thrust into nets and under the sea. The result is an intimate view of the power and danger of nature (5.146).

The Zoom and the Mobile Frame We've already seen that a zoom lens provides a continuous range of focal lengths. When the camera operator zooms during filming, the result is a mobile framing—even though the camera stays in one spot (5.41–5.43). Some viewers have trouble distinguishing a zoom-in from a forward tracking shot, or a

zoom-out from a reverse tracking shot. But filmmakers know very well that there are major differences. The choice that the director and the cinematographer make can subtly shape how the viewer responds.

The zoom lens reduces or blows up some portion of the image. Although a tracking shot and a crane shot also enlarge or reduce areas of the frame, this is not all that they do. In the genuine camera movement, static objects in different planes pass one another at different rates. We see different sides of objects, and backgrounds gain volume and depth (5.147, 5.148). By contrast, a zoom enlargement doesn't alter the aspects or positions of the objects we see. Our vantage point is the same at the end of the shot as at the beginning (5.149, 5.150). When the camera moves, we sense our own movement through the space. In a zoom, a bit of the space gets steadily magnified or demagnified.

We've pinpointed these sorts of mobile framings as isolated options. But filmmakers frequently combine them within a single shot. The camera may track



5.147



5.148



5.149



5.150

5.147–5.150 Tracking shot versus zoom. In Alain Resnais's *La Guerre est finie*, a tracking shot gives the objects considerable volume (5.147, 5.148). The wall has lost none of its solidity, and objects pass as if we were walking toward the sign. In Theo Angelopoulos's *Ulysses' Gaze*, a zoom shot simply blows up one area of the shot (5.149–5.150), as if we were adjusting a telescope. As the zoom occurs, the space looks flatter—the mark of a long-lens, or telephoto, framing.

and pan at the same time or crane up while zooming out. In *Vertigo*, an especially tricky combination track-out and zoom-in plastically distorts the shot's perspective and conveys the protagonist's dizziness. The device reappears in Spielberg's *Jaws*, when Sheriff Brody at the beach suddenly realizes that the shark has attacked a child. Simultaneously tracking and zooming in opposite directions has become common in modern Hollywood filmmaking to express a character's sense of confusion or astonishment (what director Sam Raimi calls the "warp-o cam"). The combinations are endless.

Frame Mobility: Functions Camera movements have held an appeal for filmmakers and audiences since the beginnings of cinema. Some of the earliest films made by Lumière cameramen were shots from trains or Venetian gondolas, and even today these films have a mesmeric power. Why?

For one thing, camera movements can increase information about the space of the image. Pan and tilt shots present new areas of the setting, and tracking shots and crane shots supply continually changing perspectives on it. As the camera shifts its point of view, objects or figures are usually revealed, so frame mobility can create a flow of new information for the viewer. Camera movement can as well make objects seem sharper and more vivid than in stationary framings. Certain camera movements give bodies greater solidity. This is apparently one reason modern directors like to circle around the action (5.141), as in the opening scene of *Reservoir Dogs*.

What's more, we tend to see camera movement as a substitute for *our* movement. When we see a forward tracking shot, we feel that we're approaching something or backing away. A crane shot that pulls away from something at ground level makes us feel a little weightless. We aren't completely fooled, of course. We never forget that we're watching a film in a theater. But camera movement provides several convincing cues for movement through space. Indeed, so powerful are these cues that filmmakers often make camera movements subjective—motivated narratively to represent what a moving character sees. Camera movement can be a powerful cue for a point-of-view shot.

When we walk through the world, our eyes see a somewhat bouncy view, but our optical system compensates for the jerkiness and creates a sense of stable motion. This sense of smooth movement can be captured by a traveling shot made with a dolly, a jib arm, or a Steadicam. Sometimes, however, handheld shots are used to suggest subjective point of view (5.151). Alternatively, the handheld shot can simply create a sense of anxious movement, as if the action were glimpsed on the fly (5.152).



5.151



5.152

5.151–5.152 Handheld impressions. In Samuel Fuller's *The Naked Kiss*, a handheld POV shot heightens the impact of a fight (5.151). As the protagonist of *Julien, Donkey-boy* walks, we don't get a POV shot, but Harmony Korine's bouncy, mini-DV cameras follow him shuffling through his neighborhood (5.152). The handheld camera's jerky pace complements the explosions of color created by printing video up to 35mm.



5.153



5.154



5.155

5.153–5.155 Reframing. In *His Girl Friday*, director Howard Hawks strives to balance his compositions through reframing. When Hildy crosses from the left (5.153) to sit on the desk, the camera pans right to reframe her (5.154). This reframing is more noticeable than the next one: As Walter swivels his chair to face her, the camera reframes very slightly leftward (5.155).

“I kept wondering, ‘Can people talk this much in a feature film and anybody care?’ And so I had to go through every moment in those dialogue scenes and look for the little events I would treat as large events. Like the ringing of a phone or the blinds being opened. . . . I had to treat those as fairly major events and have the moves of the camera be motivated by them, so that it would be organic to the scene yet still visually interesting.”

—John Patrick Shanley, writer and director, *Doubt*

Frame Mobility and Space We can get a little more specific about the purposes and effects of mobile framings if we consider some functions they have—in relation to cinematic space and time, in relation to the overall form of the film.

Camera movement creates an interplay of onscreen and offscreen space. If you track the camera in, you exclude more space from the shot (5.147, 5.148). If you track back, as in our example from *Jezebel* (5.91–5.94), you reveal some space that was previously offscreen. The mobile frame also continually affects the angle, level, height, or distance of the framing. A crane-up may change the angle from a low one to a high one; a track-in may change the shot scale from long shot to close-up.

As usual, one choice leads to others. For instance, just as filmmakers must decide how to motivate story actions or whether to motivate lighting sources, they must consider whether to motivate camera movement. Should you make the frame’s changing space depend on the movement in the shot? Usually, the answer is yes. A panning movement may keep a racing car centered, a tracking shot may follow a character from room to room, or a crane shot may pursue a rising balloon.

Sometimes the camera movement is quite minimal, as with **reframing**. If a character moves in relation to another character, often the frame will slightly pan or tilt to adjust to the movement (5.153–5.155). Because reframing movements are usually slight and motivated by the figures’ movement, we seldom notice them.

The framing can move independently of the figures too. Sometimes the camera drifts away from the characters to reveal something of narrative importance; the mobile frame is motivated not by figure movement but by the demands of the narration. In Jean Renoir’s *Crime of M. Lange*, the protagonist sits at his desk writing Wild West stories, but the camera pans away to show cowboy gear cluttering his room, establishing that Lange lives in a fantasy world. Similarly, an independent camera movement can point out an overlooked clue, a sign that comments on the action, or an imminent threat. The camera can thus be relatively unrestricted in its range of knowledge, as in 5.136–5.137 when it reveals Morgan’s hammer-and-sickle flower bed.

Filmmakers are especially fond of solo camera movements at the beginning of a scene or the entire film. A tracking shot can establish a locale and then smoothly let the characters enter the space (5.156–5.159). A camera movement can even foreshadow action to come. In the opening scene of *The Milk of Sorrow*, Fausta, a woman who is terrified of the world outside her home, tends her dying mother. Cinematographer Natasha Braier describes the purpose of a tracking shot (5.160, 5.161) early in the film: “The whole idea of this shot was to represent



5.156



5.157



5.158



5.159

5.156–5.159 Camera movement independent of the figures. At the start of Otto Preminger’s *Laura*, the camera glides through Waldo Lydecker’s sitting room (5.156, 5.157), establishing him as a man of wealth and refinement, before revealing the detective McPherson (5.158). The framing then becomes motivated by figure movement, with the camera following McPherson’s drift to a wall of masks (5.159).



5.160



5.161

5.160–5.161 Camera movement anticipates story action. In the opening scene of *The Milk of Sorrow*, an initial framing shows the protagonist in the room where she has spent so much time (5.160). A slow track forward nearly eliminates the window frame, framing her against the outside world that she will now have to confront (5.161).

what is going to happen in the film. At the beginning of the story, Fausta is living with her mother in a hermetic world, and now that her mother is dead, she will have to venture outside, and because of the way we frame her at the end of that shot, she actually appears to be outside.”

Whether dependent on figure movement or independent of it, the mobile frame can profoundly affect how we perceive the space of the action. Different sorts of camera movements create different treatments of space. In *Last Year at Marienbad*, Resnais often tracks down corridors and through doorways, turning a fashionable resort hotel into a maze. For *Young and Innocent*, Hitchcock (a virtuoso of camera movement) devised a shot that moves from a high-angle long shot of a ballroom over the heads of the dancers to an extreme close-up of a drummer’s blinking



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One common function of tracking shots is to follow actors in conversation, as we discuss in “Walk the talk.”

“You really need to know why you are doing one of these moves. . . . If you pan on a long lens, it’s a very different look than tracking with somebody; there’s a very different feel to it.”

—Roger Deakins, cinematographer, *No Country for Old Men*

“One thing I hate in films is when the camera starts circling characters. If three people are sitting at a table talking, you’ll often see the camera circling them. I can’t explain why, but I find it totally fake.”

—Takeshi Kitano, director, *Sonatine*



5.162



5.163

5.162–5.163 Speed of camera movement accentuates shock. In *Cloverfield* the video camera records an explosion in the street, and a whip pan to the right blurs the action (5.162). When the framing becomes stable again, we realize that the blurry movement was trying to follow the head of the Statue of Liberty rolling down the street (5.163).

eyes. In such films as *The Red and the White*, Miklós Jancsó specialized in lengthy camera movements that roam among groups of people moving across a plain. His shots use all of the resources of tracking, panning, craning, zooming, and racking focus to sculpt plastic, ever-changing spatial relations.

When we see any mobile framing, we can ask: What particular trajectory does the camera pursue? How does it function to reveal or conceal offscreen space? Does the frame mobility depend on figure movement or is it independent, drawing our attention to other things?

Frame Mobility and Time Mobile framing involves time as well as space, and filmmakers have realized that our sense of duration and rhythm is affected by the mobile frame. Since a camera movement consumes time on screen, it can create an arc of expectation and fulfillment. If the camera pans quickly from an event, we may be prompted to wonder what has happened. If the camera abruptly tracks back to show us something in the foreground that we had not expected, as in our earlier *Jezebel* example (5.91–5.94), we’re taken by surprise. If the camera slowly moves in on a detail, gradually enlarging it but delaying the fulfillment of our expectations, the camera movement has contributed to suspense. In the pan shot across M. Lange’s study mentioned earlier, Renoir makes us wonder why the camera strays from the main character and then answers the question by revealing Lange’s fascination with cowboys.

The velocity of frame mobility is important too. A zoom or a camera movement may be relatively slow or fast. Richard Lester’s *A Hard Day’s Night* and *Help!* started a fad in the 1960s for very fast zoom-ins and -outs. In comparison, one of the most impressive early camera movements, D. W. Griffith’s monumental crane shot in Belshazzar’s feast in *Intolerance*, gains majesty and suspense through its inexorably slow descent toward the immense Babylonian set (4.12).

Sometimes the speed of the mobile framing functions rhythmically, as in musical films. During the “Broadway Rhythm” number in *Singin’ in the Rain*, the camera cranes quickly back from Gene Kelly several times, and the speed of the movement is timed to accentuate the lyrics.

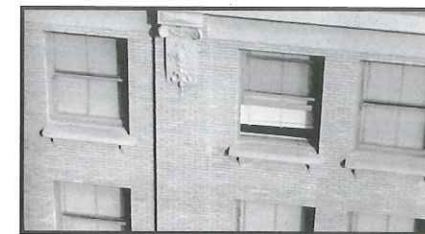
Frame velocity can also create expressive qualities—a camera movement can be fluid, staccato, hesitant, and so forth. *Cloverfield* is presented as an amateur video record of a monster’s attack on Manhattan. At many points, the operator whips the camera around to capture a shocking incident, and our anxiety is intensified by the sudden speed of the panning movement (5.162, 5.163). By choosing the duration and speed of camera movements, the filmmaker can pace our understanding of the plot action.

Larger Patterns of Frame Mobility While shaping time and space, mobile framings can become motifs across a film. In Carl Dreyer’s *Day of Wrath*, the camera circles a shadowy chamber, surveying church officials who torture an old woman accused of being a witch. She tells her inquisitor that his death is imminent. Later in the film, her accuser lies on his deathbed, and a similar camera movement recalls her curse.

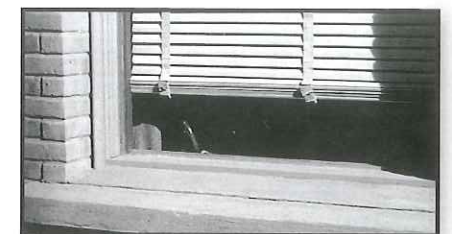
We see a more long-range motif in Hitchcock’s *Psycho*, which begins and ends with a forward movement of the frame. During the film’s first three shots, the camera pans right and zooms in on a nondescript building (5.164).



5.164



5.165



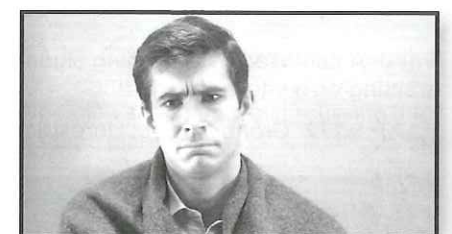
5.166



5.167



5.168



5.169

5.164–5.169 Camera movement as a motif. The opening of *Psycho*: The camera pans right and zooms in on a building in a city-scape (5.164). The camera moves toward a window to reveal the heroine and her boyfriend sharing a lunchtime tryst (5.165–5.167). The film’s next-to-last shot begins at a distance from Norman (5.168) and moves in so that we see his expression as we hear his thoughts (5.169).

Camera movements carry us under a window blind and into the darkness of a cheap hotel room (5.165–5.167). The camera’s movement inward, the penetration of an interior, is repeated throughout the film, often motivated as a subjective point of view when various characters move deeper and deeper into Norman Bates’s mansion. The next-to-last shot of the film shows Norman sitting against a blank white wall, while we hear his interior monologue (5.168). The camera again moves forward into a close-up of his face (5.169). This shot is the climax of the forward movement initiated at the start of the film; the film has traced a movement into Norman’s mind. Another film that relies heavily on a pattern of forward, penetrating movements is *Citizen Kane*, which depicts the same drive toward the revelation of a character’s secret.

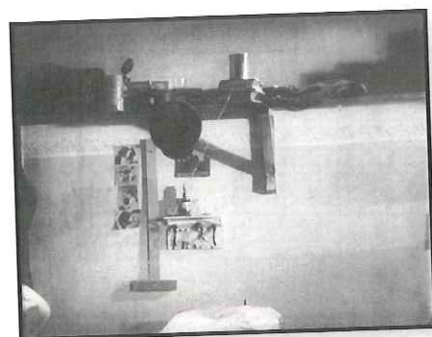
The filmmaker can develop other sorts of patterns. In Michael Snow’s *Back and Forth* (usually called *Back and Forth*), the constant panning to and fro across a classroom, Ping-Pong fashion, determines the basic formal pattern of the film. It comes as a surprise when, near the very end, the movement suddenly becomes a repeated tilting up and down. As with lighting, color, and other techniques, cinematographic choices can develop in the course of the movie.

CREATIVE DECISIONS

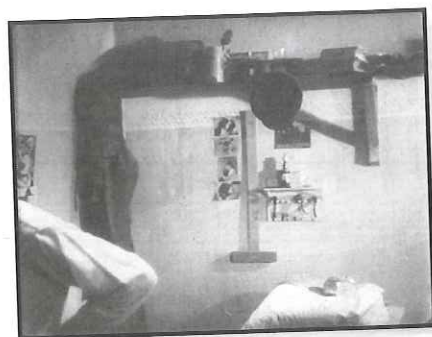
Mobile Framing and Film Form in *Grand Illusion* and *Wavelength*

Two quite different films let us sum up ways in which the director can integrate the mobile frame into an overall form. One film uses the mobile frame in order to strengthen and support the plot’s presentation of the story. The other film explores frame mobility in its own right and makes storytelling secondary—in fact, nearly nonexistent.

Jean Renoir’s *Grand Illusion* is a war film in which we almost never see the war. Heroic charges and doomed battalions, the staple of the genre, are absent. World War I remains obstinately offscreen. Instead, Renoir concentrates on life in a German prisoner-of-war camp to suggest how relations between nations and social



5.170 A can used as a warning signal is sitting on a shelf.



5.171 It's pulled over, but it lands on a pillow and so makes no sound.



5.172 The camera pans left to reveal that the characters haven't noticed it.

5.170–5.172 *Grand Illusion*: Unrestricted narration.

classes are affected by war. The prisoners Maréchal and Boeldieu are both French; Rauffenstein is a German officer. Yet the aristocrat Boeldieu has more in common with Rauffenstein than with the mechanic Maréchal.

The film's plot traces the death of the Boeldieu-Rauffenstein upper class and the precarious survival of Maréchal and his pal Rosenthal. They escape the camp and take refuge in Elsa's farm, where they enjoy an interlude of peace. Eventually, however, they must flee across the border, back to France and presumably back to the war.

Within this plot, Renoir has given camera movement several functions, all directly supportive of the narrative. As we might expect, the camera will often follow the figures to keep our attention on them. The camera tracks with Maréchal and Rosenthal walking together after their escape; it tracks back when the prisoners are drawn to the window by the sound of marching Germans below. But the camera movements *independent* of character action make the film more unusual.

When the camera moves on its own in *Grand Illusion*, we are conscious of it actively interpreting the action, creating suspense or giving us information that the characters don't have. In one scene, a prisoner is digging in an escape tunnel and tugs a string signaling that he needs to be pulled out (**5.170**). An independent camera movement builds suspense by showing that the other characters have missed the signal and do not realize that he is suffocating (**5.171**, **5.172**). Here camera movement creates a somewhat unrestricted narration.

The independent camera movements in *Grand Illusion* sometimes become motifs. For example, camera movements repeatedly link characters with details of their environment. Often a sequence begins with a close-up of some detail, and the camera draws back to anchor this detail in its larger context (**5.173**, **5.174**). More complicated is the scene of the Christmas celebration at Elsa's that begins with a close-up of the crèche and tracks back to show, in several stages, the interplay of reactions among the characters.

Such camera movements are not simply decoration; beginning on a scenic detail before moving to the larger context makes story points economically. The opening detail not only establishes a new locale but highlights a thematic point, as with the squirrel cage. So does a track-in to a detail at the *end* of a scene, as when after Boeldieu's death, Rauffenstein cuts the geranium, the one flower in the prison (**5.175**, **5.176**). Other directors would have emphasized the detail by cutting to a close-up, but Renoir keeps the film's style consistent by using a camera movement.

Characters are tied to their environment by even more ambitious moving-camera shots. These stress important narrative parallels. For example, tracking shots compare actions in two officers' bars—one French (**5.177–5.179**), one German (**5.180–5.182**). Through his camera movements, Renoir indicates a similarity between the two warring sides, blurring their national differences and stressing common desires.

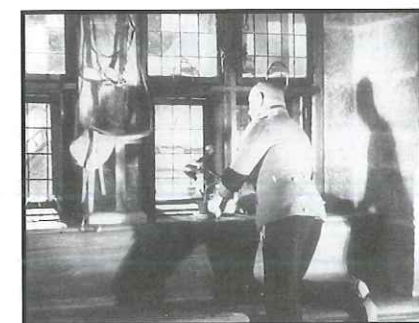
5.173–5.176 Tracking shots and details of setting in *Grand Illusion* ▶



5.173 Renoir begins the scene by framing a close-up of a caged squirrel.

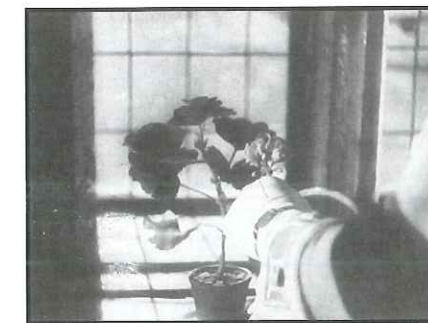


5.174 Creating a narrative parallel, the camera tracks back to reveal Boeldieu and Maréchal discussing their escape plans.



5.177–5.182 Parallel camera movements in *Grand Illusion* ▼

5.175 As Rauffenstein moves to the geranium in the window ...



5.176 ... Renoir tracks in to a close shot of the flower as he cuts it. Earlier Boeldieu had admired the geranium.



5.177 In the first scene, as Maréchal leaves the French officers' bar ...



5.178 ... Renoir pans and tracks left from the door to reveal pin-ups (just coming into the frame at the right) ...



5.179 ... and a poster.



5.180 One scene later, in the German officers' bar, a similar camera movement, this time toward the right, leaves the characters ...



5.181 ... and explores on its own ...



5.182 ... discovering some similar decorations.



5.183 One of the most elaborate camera movements in the film starts on a crucifix.



5.184 The camera tilts down to a military portrait on an altar, underlining the irony of a chapel commandeered as an officer's quarters.



5.185 The camera tracks past whips, spurs, and swords . . .



5.186 . . . to an orderly who is preparing Rauffenstein's gloves.



5.187 The orderly then walks away from the camera to close a window before returning . . .



5.188 . . . to the foreground. The camera pans left and tracks back to reveal . . .



5.189 . . . a tidy table . . .



5.190 . . . at which Rauffenstein is revealed to be sitting, ready for breakfast. For aristocratic warriors, the comforts of home aren't interrupted by war.

5.183–5.190 Prison camp: Military elegance in *Grand Illusion*.

Or consider how two moments of camera movement compare the war of the aristocrats and the war of the lower-class people. We are introduced to Rauffenstein's new position as commander of a POW camp through a lengthy tracking shot (**5.183–5.190**). During this movement, Renoir presents, wordlessly, the military mystique of grace on the battlefield that characterizes the aristocrat's war. Late in the film, however, a parallel shot criticizes this one (**5.191–5.193**). Elsa's war has none of Rauffenstein's glory, and our sense of that is conveyed chiefly through a parallel created by the repeated camera movement. Moreover, these camera movements work together with mise-en-scene, as the narrative

parallel is reinforced by the subtle use of objects as motifs—the crucifixes in 5.183 and 5.193, the photographs in 5.184 and 5.191, and the tables that end both shots.

Moving the camera independently also links characters with one another. Again and again in the POW camp, the camera shifts to join one man to his comrades, spatially indicating their shared condition. As the prisoners ransack the collection of women's clothes, one man decides to dress up in them. When he appears in drag, a stillness falls over the men. Renoir tracks silently over the prisoners' faces, each one registering a reticent longing for a world they have left behind.

A more elaborate linking movement occurs in the scene of the prison vaudeville show, when the men learn that the French have recaptured a city. Renoir presents the shot as a celebration of spatial unity, with the camera moving among the men as they begin defiantly to sing the "Marseillaise" (**5.194–5.200**). This complex camera movement circulates freely among the prisoners, suggesting their patriotic courage and unified defiance of their captors.

In Elsa's cottage as well, camera movement links characters. After feeding a cow, Maréchal enters the house, and a pan with him reveals Elsa scrubbing the floor. The culmination of the linking movements comes near the film's end, when Renoir pans from the Germans on one side of the border (**5.201**) to the distant French escapees on the other (**5.202, 5.203**). Even on this scale, Renoir's camera refuses to honor national divisions.

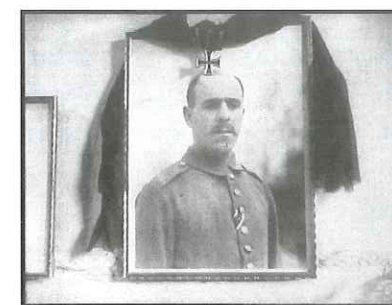
The French film critic André Bazin remarked: "Jean Renoir found a way to reveal the hidden meaning of people and things without destroying the unity that is natural to them." Renoir's precisely choreographed camera movements go beyond simply enabling us to grasp the story. By providing information at a certain pace, by placing emphasis and by making comparisons, the mobile frame in *Grand Illusion* becomes as important as the mise-en-scene.

Michael Snow's experimental film *Wavelength* gives the mobile frame a different role. Instead of helping us construct a story, the camera style blocks that effort. Instead Snow asks us to concentrate our attention on how frame mobility creates patterns in its own right. Like Gehr's *Serene Velocity* (p. 172), the film becomes an experiment in cinematography.

The film begins with a long-shot framing of a loft apartment, facing one wall and window (**5.204**). The camera zooms in abruptly a short distance and then holds that framing. It zooms in a bit more and then holds that (**5.205**). And so it goes throughout the film's 45-minute length. By the end, a photograph of ocean waves on the distant wall fills the frame in close-up.

Wavelength is structured primarily around a single kind of frame mobility, the zoom-in. The film's progression concentrates on how changing lens lengths transforms the space of the loft. The sudden zooms create frequent abrupt shifts of perspective. In excluding parts of the room, the zoom-in also magnifies and flattens what we see; every change of focal length gives us a new set of spatial relations. As the film goes on, the zoom pushes more and more space offscreen. The sound track, for the most part, reinforces the basic formal development by emitting a single humming tone that rises consistently in pitch as the zoom magnifies the space.

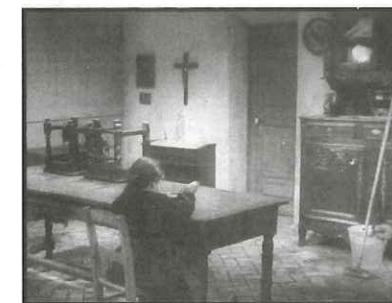
Within *Wavelength*'s overall form, though, there are two contrasting patterns. The first is a series of filtered tints that play across the image as abstract fields of color. These tints often work against the depth represented in the shot of the loft. A second pattern suggests a sketchy narrative. At various intervals, characters enter the loft and talk, listen to the radio, make phone calls, and perform other ordinary actions. There's even a mysterious death: A body is glimpsed on the floor (**5.206**). But these events remain unexplained in cause-effect terms and inconclusive (although at the film's end we do hear a sound that resembles a police siren). Furthermore, none of these actions swerves the mobile framing from its predetermined course. The jerkily shifting and halting zoom continues, even when it frames out important narrative information. *Wavelength* pulls in bits and pieces of narrative action, but they remain secondary; they're less important than the progression of the zoom.



5.191 This shot, set inside Elsa's farmhouse, also begins on an object, a photograph of her dead husband.



5.192 The camera tracks left past Elsa, who remarks, "Now the table is too large."



5.193 The camera continues, revealing the kitchen table, where her daughter sits alone. The chairs upended on the table reinforce the solitude of Elsa's life in the midst of war.

5.191–5.193 Farmhouse: War's cost in *Grand Illusion*.



5.194 As the lead “female” singer whips off his wig and requests the “Marseillaise” from the musicians...



5.195 ... the camera moves right and the singer turns toward the audience.



5.196 The camera tracks farther right as others onstage sing along.



5.197 A tilt down shows two worried German guards in the foreground.



5.198 A track back to the left reveals a row of French prisoners in the audience on their feet, singing.



5.199 The camera tracks forward past them to the musicians and singer again...



5.200 ... then pans quickly left to reveal the assembled prisoners again, this time declaring their patriotism directly to the camera.

5.194–5.200 *Grand Illusion*: Camera movement as prisoner solidarity.

As an experimental film, *Wavelength*'s use of frame mobility arouses, delays, and gratifies unusual expectations. The fragmentary plot briefly arouses curiosity (What are the people up to? What has led to the man's death, if he does die?) and surprise (the apparent murder). But in general, a story-centered suspense is replaced by a *stylistic* suspense. The zoom is the only sign of development, so we're curious about what it will eventually reveal.

Yet the revelation is delayed by the colored tints, the bits of plot, and the spasmodic qualities of the zoom itself. When the zoom finally reveals its target, our stylistic anticipations find fulfillment. The film's title stands revealed as a multiple pun, referring not only to the steadily rising pitch of the sound track but also to the distance that the zoom had to cross in order to reveal the photo—a “wave length.”



5.201 The Germans realize that Maréchal and Rosenthal have crossed over into Switzerland.



5.202 Renoir pans to the right across the invisible border...

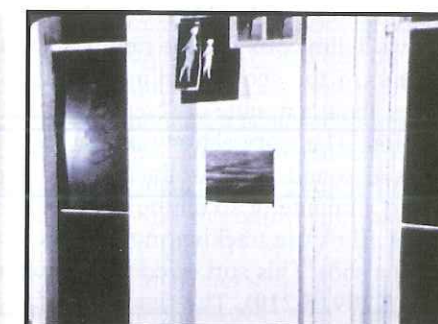


5.203 ... to reveal the two escapees, tiny dots in the huge landscape.

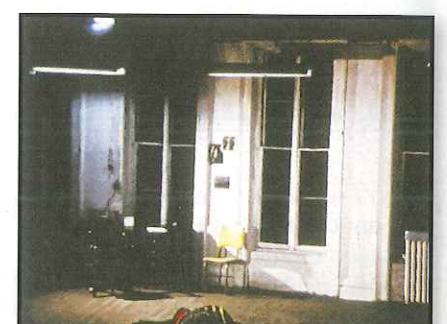
5.201–5.203 Border crossing in *Grand Illusion*.



5.204



5.205



5.206

5.204–5.206 The spasmodic space of *Wavelength*. Early in the film, much of the apartment is visible (5.204). Near the end, the abrupt zoom-ins have made the distant wall visible (5.205). A fallen body can be glimpsed at the bottom of the frame, but the zoom-ins will soon eliminate it from the frame (5.206).

This revelation is secondary to the experience of watching the halting zoom change the space of the room, and watching a stylistic pattern curb our narrative appetite.

Grand Illusion and *Wavelength* illustrate, in different ways, how frame mobility can shape our perception of a film's space and time. Renoir motivated his style of frame mobility by narrative form, while Snow made the technique the principal formal concern, motivating other aspects of the film.

Duration of the Image: The Long Take

Throughout this chapter, we've seen that the decisions that filmmakers make about cinematography affect both space and time. The range of photographic tonalities, the shot's perspective relations, and the position of the camera are largely matters of space. But other possibilities, like speed of motion and mobile framing, have consequences for time too. The last area of choice and control we consider involves time in an especially intriguing way.

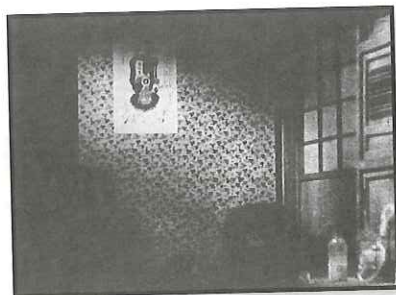
One popular YouTube genre is the so-called lipdub, in which a group of performers, usually students, lip-sync a pop song. Usually these videos feature lengthy camera movements within a single shot. There is a certain pride in choreographing all the “singers” with the moving camera in the two or three minutes that the song takes. Cutting would be easier, but there'd be less sense of virtuosity, less of a wow factor.

The lipdub phenomenon reflects one constant factor across the history of film art: the idea that there's something to be gained by letting a shot run long. But how



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We connect the video genre of the lipdub to traditions of long-take filming in “2-4-6-8,” whose lipdub do we appreciate?”



5.207



5.208

5.207–5.208 Compressing screen duration within a single shot. A shot in *The Only Son* moves from night (5.207) to morning (5.208).



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We discuss artistic aspects of the long take in “Harry Potter treated with gravity” and “*Birdman*: Following Riggan’s orders.”



5.209



5.210

5.209–5.210 Camera movement through the seasons. In Roger Michell’s *Notting Hill*, the protagonist’s walk through the Portobello street market moves through autumn (5.209), then winter (5.210). Eventually the shot ends with spring.

long, and why? Jean-Luc Godard asks the question explicitly. “The only great problem with cinema seems to me, more and more with each film, when and why to start a shot and when and why to end it.” What guides a director in deciding how long to let a shot last?

Real Time Is . . . What?

When people talk about filming something in “real time,” they often imply that the shot is recording actual duration. Usually it is. If we film a runner taking three seconds to clear a hurdle, our projected film will typically consume three seconds. But the filmmaker can choose to override real duration. As we’ve already seen, screen duration can be manipulated through slow or fast motion. Less obviously, narrative films don’t always let us equate screen duration with story duration, even within a single shot.

As Chapter 3 pointed out (p. 80), story duration usually differs from plot duration, and both are affected by film techniques that shape screen time. You can compress story duration within a single shot. Here’s an example from Yasujiro Ozu’s *The Only Son*.

It is well past midnight, and we have just seen a family awake and talking. The shot shows a dim corner of the family’s apartment, but eventually the light changes. By the end of the shot, morning has come (5.207, 5.208). This transitional shot consumes about a minute of screen time, but that plainly isn’t the “real time” of the story action. The story action takes at least five hours. Thanks to cues of lighting, setting, and sound, the sustained shot has condensed a story duration of several hours into a minute or so on the screen.

Other films use tracking movements to compress longer passages of time in a continuous shot. This sort of condensation has become easier with digital postproduction (5.209, 5.210). The final shot of *Signs* moves away from an autumn view through a window and through a room, to reveal a winter landscape outside another window. Months of story time have passed during the tracking movement.

Functions of the Long Take

We can ask Godard’s question a different way: How long should a shot last? Shot durations have varied somewhat over history. Early cinema (1895–1905) tended to rely on fairly lengthy shots, since each film often consisted of only one shot. With the emergence of continuity editing in the period 1905–1916, shots became shorter. From the late 1910s to the early 1920s, an American film would have an average shot length of about 5 seconds. After the coming of sound, the average stretched to about 10 seconds. But in the mid-1930s, directors in several countries began to experiment with very lengthy shots. The intricate camera movements in *Grand Illusion*, from 1935, are good examples. Renoir and his peers showed that unusually lengthy shots—**long takes**, as they’re called—represented a powerful creative resource.

A *long take* is not the same as a *long shot*, which refers to the apparent distance between camera and object. As we saw in examining film production (pp. 22–23),

a *take* is one run of the camera that records a single shot. To prevent ambiguity, we call a protracted shot a long take rather than a long shot.

In the films of Jean Renoir, Kenji Mizoguchi, Orson Welles, Carl Dreyer, Miklós Jancsó, Hou Hsiao-hsien, and Bèla Tarr, a shot may go on for several minutes. One shot in Andy Warhol’s *My Hustler* runs for about 30 minutes and constitutes much of the film’s second half (5.211). It would be impossible to appreciate the artistry of these films without considering what the long take contributes to form and style.

Usually, we can regard the long take as an alternative to a series of shots. The director may choose between presenting a scene in long takes and presenting it in several shorter shots. When an entire scene is rendered in only one shot, the long take is sometimes called a *sequence shot*, a translation of the French term *plan-séquence*. In any film, most filmmakers mix edited scenes with scenes handled in long takes. This allows the filmmaker to bring out specific values in particular scenes, or to associate certain aspects of narrative or nonnarrative form with the different stylistic options.

A vivid instance occurs in Steve McQueen’s *Hunger*, based on a hunger strike in a prison in Northern Ireland. Most of the scenes, including violent confrontations between prisoners and guards, consist of several shots. At this point, Bobby Sands, the main character, seems only one prisoner among many. Roughly halfway through the film, the plot starts to focus on him and we begin to understand his motives and plans. The key scene begins with a shot lasting nearly 18 minutes, a balanced view of Sands and an old friend who visits him (5.212). There is no camera movement. The effect is to rivet the viewer on the character’s dialogue during a turning point in the action.

Alternatively, the filmmaker may decide to build the entire film out of long takes. Hitchcock’s *Rope* is famous for containing only 11 shots, most running between 4 and 10 minutes. Similarly, each scene in *Winterwind*, *Red Psalm*, and other films by Miklós Jancsó consists of a single shot. In such cases, the long take becomes a large-scale part of a film.

In a long-take movie, editing can have great force. After a seven- or eight-minute shot, an elliptical cut can prove quite disorienting. Gus van Sant’s *Elephant* traces events around a high school shooting rampage, and it presents most scenes in very long takes following students through the hallways. Moreover, *Elephant*’s plot doesn’t present the events in chronological order. The narration flashes back to show other school days, the boys’ lives at home, and their preparations for the killings. So when a cut interrupts a long take, the audience must reflect for a moment to determine how the new shot fits into story chronology. The effect of the editing is unusually harsh, because the cuts tend to break the smooth rhythm of the sustained traveling shots (5.213–5.215).

Could a feature-length movie consist of one long take? Many directors have dreamed of it, but the lengths of film reels were a constraint. A 35mm camera reel typically runs for only 11 minutes, so Hitchcock sought to hide some of *Rope*’s obligatory cuts. Extended 16mm reels of the type Warhol used in *My Hustler* (5.211) can run up to 30 minutes. With digital video, however, it is possible to shoot for hours on a single tape or file, and the Russian director Aleksander Sokurov seized this opportunity in *Russian Ark*. The film consists of a single shot nearly 90 minutes long, as the camera follows over 2,000 actors in period costume through St. Petersburg’s immense Winter Palace. *Russian Ark* takes us through several eras of Russian history, culminating in a stupendous ballroom dance and a crowd drifting off into a wintry night (5.216–5.218).

Thanks to digital postproduction, a long take can be even longer. Software can blend shots undetectably, so that *Birdman*; *Or, The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance* could present an apparently continuous shot that lasts over 100 minutes on the screen.



5.211 The long take and narrative form. A long take in *My Hustler* captures the seductive exchange of two gay men as they groom themselves in a bathroom.



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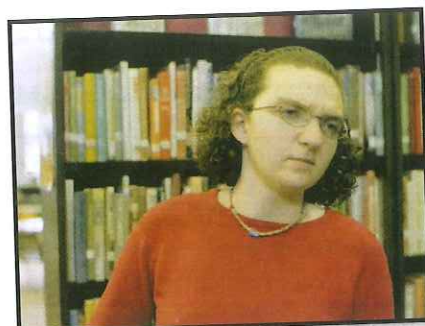
Both *There Will Be Blood* and *The Most Beautiful* contain subtle staging in two unmoving long takes. We compare them in “Hands (and faces) across the table.”



5.212 The long take to mark a turning point. Backlighting and a lengthy, static shot in *Hunger* place us at a distance from Bobby Sands and his visitor. The director’s stylistic choice allows us to concentrate on their words, which provide important exposition about the planned hunger strike.



5.213



5.214



5.215

5.213–5.215 Discontinuous editing interrupts a long take. In a shot lasting two minutes, the camera follows Michelle into the library, where she starts reshelving books (5.123). Many of the long takes in *Elephant* frame the walking characters from behind. This conceals their facial expressions from us and emphasizes the school environment. Michelle turns as we hear a rifle being cocked (5.214). We expect a reverse shot to reveal the shooter. Instead, we get a flashback to earlier that day when the two boys showered together before going to school on their deadly mission (5.215).



5.216



5.217



5.218

5.216–5.218 *Russian Ark* and the long take. In *Russian Ark*, one episode takes place in the palace theater, with Catherine the Great pronouncing the rehearsal satisfactory (5.216). An hour or so later, still within the same shot, hundreds of aristocrats and officers descend a staircase toward the impending devastation of the Russian Revolution (5.217). Crew members moved through the Hermitage Museum, filming with a digital camera mounted on a Steadicam (5.218). Sokurov rehearsed *Russian Ark* for several months and completed the take used in the film on the fourth try. Today, a shot like this could be assembled out of several takes blended in postproduction, as in *Snake Eyes* or *Birdman*.

The Long Take and the Mobile Frame

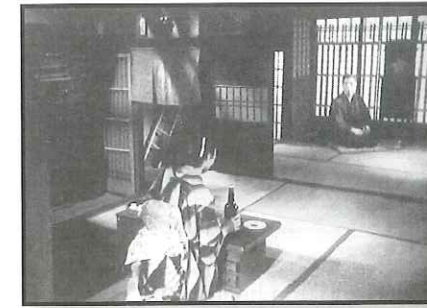
The static long take in *Hunger* is unusual; most long takes, like those in *Elephant*, *Russian Ark*, and *Birdman* (and in DIY lipdubs), rely on camera movement. Panning, tracking, craning, or zooming can be used to present continually changing vantage points that are comparable in some ways to the shifts of view supplied by editing.



5.219 The long take begins with Omocha and the businessman seated. The camera follows her as ...



5.220 ... she moves to the opposite end of the room ...



5.221 ... and sits at a small table facing him.



5.222 A second phase of the shot begins as she begins to appeal to his sympathy and he moves to the table ...



5.223 ... and sits down to console her.



5.224 Finally, the camera moves into a tighter shot as she sits beside him and he succumbs to her advances.

5.219–5.224 *Sisters of Gion*: The long take marks stages of the action.

Very often, frame mobility breaks the long-take shot into smaller units. In Mizoguchi's *Sisters of Gion*, one long take shows a young woman, Omocha, luring a businessman into becoming her patron (5.219–5.224). Though there is no cutting, the camera and figure movements demarcate important stages of the scene's action.

As in this example, long takes tend to be framed in medium or long shots rather than close-ups. The camera takes us through a fairly dense visual field, and the spectator has more opportunity to scan the shot for particular points of interest. This is recognized by Steven Spielberg, a director who has occasionally exploited lengthy takes:

I'd love to see directors start trusting the audience to be the film editor with their eyes, the way you are sometimes with a stage play, where the audience selects who they would choose to look at while a scene is being played. ... There's so much cutting and so many close-ups being shot today I think directly as an influence from television.

As we saw in the previous chapter, the arrangement of the mise-en-scene can guide our scanning of the frame. Accordingly, a director may choose to put editing aside and let a gradually unfolding long take steer us from one information-packed frame to another. This is what happens in *Sisters of Gion*, as the camera movement follows Omocha's seduction of the businessman.

The example from *Sisters of Gion* illustrates another important feature of the long take. Mizoguchi's shot reveals a complete internal logic—a beginning, middle, and end. As part of a film, the long take can have its own formal pattern, its own development, its own trajectory and shape. Suspense may develop; we start to ask how the shot will continue and when it will end.

The classic example of how the long take can constitute a formal pattern in its own right is the opening sequence of Welles's *Touch of Evil* (5.225–5.236). This opening shot makes plain some basic features of the long take. It offers an



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Mizoguchi, a master of staging, became famous for his elegant long takes. We consider his style in "Mizoguchi: Secrets of the exquisite image."



5.225 The opening shot begins with a close-up of a hand setting the timer of a bomb.



5.226 The camera tracks immediately right to follow first the shadow ...



5.227 ... and then the figure of an unknown assassin planting the bomb in a car.



5.228 The camera then cranes up to a high angle as the assassin flees and the victims arrive and set out in the car.



5.229 As the camera rounds the corner, it rejoins the car. A reverse tracking shot keeps it in frame.



5.230 The car passes Vargas and his wife, Susan, and the camera starts to follow them, losing the car and tracking diagonally backward with the couple through the crowd.



5.231 The camera tracks backward until both the occupants of the car and Susan and Vargas meet again.



5.232 The camera remains in one place to let the brief scene with the border guard play out.



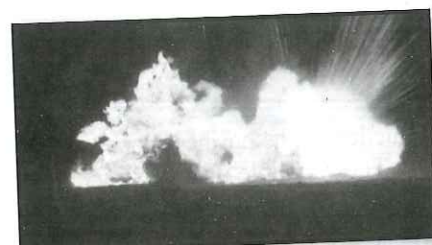
5.233 After tracking left with the car, the camera catches up with Susan and Vargas and tracks forward toward them ...



5.234 ... bringing them into medium shot as they begin to kiss.



5.235 Their embrace is interrupted by the offscreen sound of an explosion, and they turn to look leftward.



5.236 The next shot zooms in to show the car in flames.

5.225–5.236 *Touch of Evil*: The virtuoso moving long take.

alternative to building the sequence out of many shots, and it stresses the cut that finally comes (occurring at the sound of the explosion of the car).

The shot has its own internal pattern of development. We expect that the bomb shown at the beginning will explode at some point, and we wait for that explosion through the long take. The shot establishes the geography of the scene, the border between Mexico and the United States. The camera movement, alternately picking up the car and the walking couple, weaves together two lines of narrative cause and effect that intersect at the border station. Vargas and Susan are thus drawn into the action involving the bombing. Our expectation is fulfilled when the end of the shot coincides with the explosion (offscreen) of the bomb. The shot has guided our response by taking us through a suspenseful development.

The long take can present, in a single chunk of time, a complex pattern of events moving toward a goal, and this ability shows that shot duration can be as important to the image as photographic qualities and framing are.

SUMMARY

The film shot is a complex unit. By controlling mise-en-scene, the filmmaker fills the image with material, arranging setting, lighting, costume, and staging within the formal context of the total film. Similarly, the shot is shaped by the cinematographic options we've been examining.

Those options bear on photographic qualities: tonality, speed of motion, and the varieties of perspective created by lens lengths, depth of field, and special effects. The filmmaker can also reckon in the aspect ratio and decide how the image is framed. Other creative choices involve varying camera placement—the angle, level, height, and distance at which we see the subject. The filmmaker can decide to move the frame in a host of ways, and can choose to exploit the long take with or without camera movement.

The array of choices is dazzling, and as with mise-en-scene, decision making is at the center of film artistry. Forced to choose one way or another, the filmmaker pursues options that will give the viewer a specific experience—and

perhaps also challenge the filmmaker's skills. In turn, the choices that are made can coalesce into a pattern, the style of that particular film.

You can sensitize yourself to cinematographic options in much the same way that you worked on mise-en-scene. Trace the progress of a single technique, such as camera distance, through an entire scene. Notice when a shot begins and ends, observing how a long take may function to shape the film's form. Watch for camera movements, especially those that follow the action (since those are usually the hardest to notice). Once you notice cinematographic qualities, you can move to an understanding of their various functions within the sequence and the film as a whole.

Film art offers still other possibilities for choice and control. Chapter 4 and this chapter focused on the shot. The filmmaker may also juxtapose one shot with another through editing, and that's the subject of Chapter 6.

CHAPTER

6

The Relation of Shot to Shot: Editing

Since the 1920s, when film theorists began to realize what **editing** can achieve, it has been the most widely discussed film technique. This hasn't been all to the good. Some writers have mistakenly found in editing the key to good cinema (or even *all* cinema). Yet many film scenes don't use editing extensively.

As we saw in the last chapter, some films consist of very few shots. Some major films from the 1910s, such as Victor Sjöström's *Ingeborg Holm*, consist largely of single-take scenes; these shape our experience by subtle manipulations of mise-en-scene. Other films, such as *Touch of Evil* and *Birdman*, use long takes with camera movements to guide our moment-by-moment understanding of the action. Films relying on long takes aren't necessarily less "cinematic" than films that break down scenes into many shots.

Still, we can see why editing has exercised such an enormous fascination. It's very powerful. The ride of the Klan in *The Birth of a Nation*, the Odessa Steps sequence in *Potemkin*, the hunt sequence in *The Rules of the Game*, the shower murder in *Psycho*, Clarice Starling's discovery of the killer's lair in *The Silence of the Lambs*, the reconstruction of the Dallas assassination in *JFK*, the quickfire shifts among dream layers in *Inception*—these and many other screen moments derive their impact from editing. No wonder that cutting plays a huge role in mass-market filmmaking. Today's Hollywood movie typically contains between 1,000 and 2,000 shots; an action movie can have 3,000 or more.

Editing decisions can also build the film's overall form. The nested segments in *Citizen Kane* (pp. 101–102) are defined by editing transitions. In long-take films, shot changes usually mark out scenes or sequences. Warhol's *My Hustler* contains only three cuts, but they give the film four large-scale parts. By stressing the shift from segment to segment, editing can shape our responses to individual scenes and the entire movie.

This powerful, pervasive technique confronts the filmmaker with a huge number of choices. Cut here or there? Put this shot before or after that one? Does this string of shots make sense? The options are multiplied in digital filmmaking, with its power to redo shots in postproduction. James Cameron comments:

You can almost get buried by possibilities. In a normal editing situation, depending on the material, you might end up just selecting the performance that has the least number of deficits to it. But with what we've created, anything can be in focus, anything can be out of focus, or lit differently at any time. You can do virtual camera work on a performance that was shot six months earlier. . . . There's always the risk of getting bogged down. You find yourself asking, "Why?" a whole lot more than you normally

might. "Why am I on this angle? Why am I on a close-up on this actor when a wide shot might work better?" In a way, it puts you back to basics as an editor.

Even without the CGI resources of *Avatar*, a filmmaker must think constantly about editing.

What Is Editing?

You already know something about editing. As a viewer, you notice when the cutting is very fast, during a chase scene or a fight. If you've made some videos, you've probably done some editing, assembling various shots in your preferred order and trimming them until they seem the right length. You're aware that editing lets the filmmaker decide what shots to include and how they will be arranged.

These sorts of decisions are multiplied vastly in professional filmmaking. Just the matter of selection can be daunting. An editor on the typical feature-length film is faced with a mountain of footage. *The Social Network* in finished form ran two hours, but 286 hours of material were shot—not an unusual amount for such a project.

To ease the task, most fiction filmmakers plan for the editing phase during the preparation and shooting phases. Scripts, storyboards, and previzualizations allow shots to be imagined in advance. Documentary filmmakers often shoot extra footage of settings, documents, or significant objects. These can be useful in cutting together material caught on the fly. For *Paradise Lost: The Child Murders at Robin Hood Hills*, the directors filmed aerial shots of the neighborhood that was central to the crime. These serve as transitions linking sections of the film.

Once the material is selected, the editor joins the shots, the end of one to the beginning of another. The most common join is the **cut**. A cut provides an instantaneous change from one shot to another. Other methods of joining shots produce more gradual changes. A **fade-out** gradually darkens the end of a shot to black, and a **fade-in** lightens a shot from black. A **dissolve** briefly superimposes the end of shot A and the beginning of shot B (6.1–6.3). In a **wipe**, shot B replaces shot A by means of a boundary line moving across the screen (6.4). Here both images are briefly on the screen at the same time, but they do not blend, as in a dissolve. Before the rise of digital editing in the 1990s, a cut was usually made by splicing two shots together with film cement or tape. Fades, dissolves, and wipes were executed with optical printers or in the laboratory. In computer editing, all types of edits are created with the software. Similar software allows all these sorts of edits to be made in presentation programs like PowerPoint.

Although everyone is somewhat aware of editing, we can understand the filmmaker's creative choices more fully if we look at the technique systematically. In this chapter, we show how editing allows the filmmaker to manipulate time, space, and pictorial qualities in ways that shape the viewer's experience of the film.

“Editing is the basic creative force, by power of which the soulless photographs (the separate shots) are engineered into living, cinematographic form.”

—V. I. Pudovkin, director

“You can definitely help performances in the cutting room, by intercutting reaction, maybe re-recording lines, adding lines over reaction shots. And you can help a film's structure by moving sequences about and dropping scenes that hold up pacing. And sometimes you can use bits and pieces from different takes, which also helps a lot. What you can do in the editing room to help a film is amazing!”

—Jodie Foster, actor and director



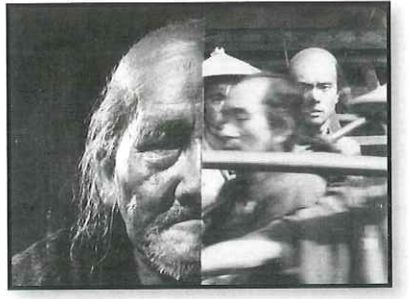
6.1



6.2



6.3



6.4

6.1–6.4 Linking shots with optical devices. The first shot of *The Maltese Falcon* (6.1) ends with a dissolve (6.2) to the second shot (6.3). In *Seven Samurai*, a wipe joins the last shot of one scene with the first of the next (6.4).



6.5 Shot 1



6.6 Shot 2



6.7 Shot 3



6.8 Shot 4

6.5–6.8 Editing for timing and impact: Four shots from *The Birds*.

CREATIVE DECISIONS

Why Cut? Four Shots from *The Birds*

Here's a portion of the attack on the Bodega Bay waterfront in Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds* (6.5–6.8).

1. *Medium shot, straight-on angle.* Melanie, Mitch, and the fisherman are standing by the restaurant window talking. Melanie is on the extreme right, the bartender is in the background (6.5).
2. *Medium close-up.* Melanie is standing by the fisherman's shoulder. She looks to the right (out of frame) and up, as if following with her eyes. The camera pans right with her as she turns to the window and looks out (6.6).
3. *Extreme long shot.* Melanie's point of view: The gas station across the street, with the phone booth in the left foreground. Birds dive-bomb the attendant, swooping right to left (6.7).
4. *Medium close-up.* Melanie, in profile. The fisherman moves right into the frame, blocking out the bartender. Mitch moves right into the extreme foreground. All three in profile look out the window (6.8).

Each of these four shots presents a different bit of time and space and a different array of graphic qualities. The first shot shows the characters talking (6.5). A cut shifts us to a medium close-up shot of Melanie. Here space has changed (Melanie is isolated and larger in the frame), time is continuous, and the graphic configurations have changed (the arrangements of the shapes and colors vary). Another cut takes us instantly to what she sees (6.6). The gas station shot (6.7) presents a different space, another bit of time, and a different graphic configuration. Another cut returns us to Melanie (6.8), and again we are shifted instantly to another space, the next slice of time, and a different graphic configuration. The four shots are joined by three cuts.

Hitchcock could have presented the *Birds* scene without editing. Using deep-space staging, he might have created a deep-focus composition like those in Figures 5.48 and 5.49. He could have placed Mitch and the fisherman in the foreground, Melanie and the window in the middle ground, and the gull attack in the distance, visible through the window. The scene could now be played in one shot, for we would have no abrupt change of time or space or graphics.

But editing gives Hitchcock control of timing and impact. At a certain moment he can fasten our attention on Melanie alone, not the men: shot 2 demands that we notice her response. Similarly, shot 3 obliges us to watch the bird attack as she sees it, with nothing else in the frame to distract us. Editing allows Hitchcock to march us in step with the action.

We've seen that through mise-en-scene and cinematography the filmmaker can create a shot containing many points of interest. Tim Smith's experiment in eye-tracking (4.122, 4.123) shows that a director can subtly guide our attention to a single area of a shot. Why didn't Hitchcock take that option? Because his cuts do more than simply isolate parts of the action: they *emphasize* them. The cut-in to Melanie enlarges her suddenly, creating a little punch. The same thing happens with the bird attack. If we watched it through a window in the rear of a deep-space shot, it would be a tiny part of the image. As an enlarged view of the gas station, it gains in significance.

In addition, if Hitchcock had presented all the action in a single shot, he wouldn't have engaged our minds in quite the same way. When he cuts from shot 2, of Melanie looking, to shot 3, the gull's swooping, we have to think a little. We have to infer that shot 3 is what Melanie sees. We've known this convention for most of our lives, but it still calls on us to use our imagination to connect the shots.

So a deep-space, deep-focus shot would have a rather different effect. But there was another option, you might say. What if Hitchcock used a continuous shot

but moved his camera? Imagine that the camera frames the people talking, tracks in and rightward to Melanie as she turns, pans right to the window to show the dive-bombing gull, and pans back left to catch the group's expressions. This would constitute one complicated shot, somewhat like the *Grand Illusion* example we considered in the previous chapter (5.194–5.200). The varied framing would provide emphasis, picking out some parts of the scene while leaving out others. But camera movements, no matter how fast, would not present the *sudden* breaks that the cuts produce. Again, it's a matter of timing and heightened impact. In the *Grand Illusion* scene, the panning and tracking movements gradually reveal the reaction of the German officers to the prisoners' show. Cutting enables Hitchcock to make the bird attack more abrupt and startling—a quality that suits the story action at that point.

In all, editing allows Hitchcock to isolate and magnify each bit of action and to control the pace of our uptake. We must surrender to the swift, sharp flow of shots, but we also devote a bit of mental energy to figuring out how they fit together. When filmmakers want to pattern our experience so precisely, editing becomes an attractive stylistic option.

Dimensions of Film Editing

Editing offers the filmmaker four basic areas of choice and control:

1. Graphic relations between shot A and shot B
2. Rhythmic relations between shot A and shot B
3. Spatial relations between shot A and shot B
4. Temporal relations between shot A and shot B

Let's trace the range of choice and control in each area.

Graphic Relations between Shot A and Shot B

The four shots from *The Birds* show the time and space of the scene, but we can see them purely as graphic configurations as well. They display patterns of light and dark, line and shape, volumes and depths, movement and stasis. And we can compare these qualities across shots.

For instance, Hitchcock didn't drastically alter the overall brightness from shot to shot, because the scene takes place during the day. If the scene had been set at night, he could have cut from the fairly bright second shot in the bar (6.6, Melanie turning to the window) to a shot of the gas station swathed in darkness. That would have created a stronger contrast. Moreover, Hitchcock usually keeps the most important part of the composition roughly in the center of the frame. (Compare Melanie's position in the frame with that of the gas station in 6.7.) He could, however, have cut from a shot in which Melanie was in, say, upper frame left to a shot locating the gas station in the lower right of the frame. Again, there would have been a sense of less graphic continuity.

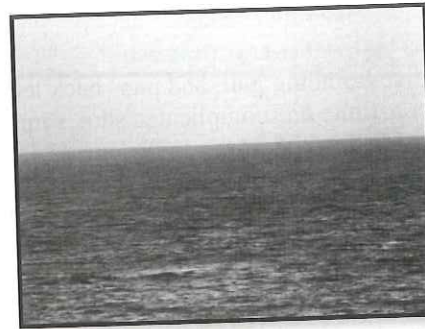
We've already seen that pictorial contrasts can be powerful in guiding our attention (p. 160), and Hitchcock's editing does work a bit on them. Melanie's hair and outfit make her a predominantly yellow and green figure, but the shot of the gas station is dominated by drab grays set off by touches of red in the gas pumps. Alternatively, Hitchcock could have chosen to cut from Melanie to another figure composed of similar colors. Furthermore, the action in Melanie's shot—her turning to the window—doesn't blend into the movements of either the attendant or the gull in the next shot. But Hitchcock could have echoed Melanie's movement by some motion in the shot that followed.

The implication is simple but powerful. If you put any two shots together, you'll create some interaction between the *purely pictorial* qualities of those two shots.

6.9–6.13 Graphic matching, static and dynamic. A shot from *True Stories* showing the Texas horizon midway up the frame (6.9) is graphically matched with a shot showing the waterline of ancient seas in the same position (6.10). *Seven Samurai*: The first three (6.11–6.13) of six shots of running samurai. Kurosawa matches the shots through composition, lighting, setting, figure movement, and the panning camera movement.



6.9



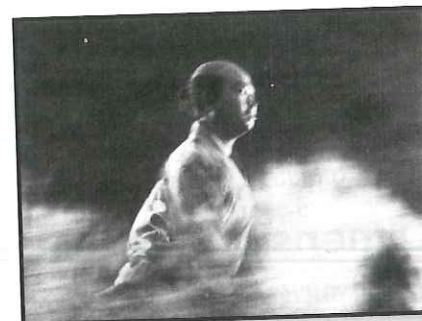
6.10



6.11



6.12



6.13

The four aspects of mise-en-scene (lighting, setting, costume, and the movement of the figures) and most cinematographic qualities (photography, framing, and camera mobility) all furnish graphic elements. Every shot provides possibilities for purely graphic editing, and every shot-change creates some sort of graphic relationship between two shots.

Graphic Editing: Matches and Clashes Graphics may be edited to achieve smooth continuity or abrupt contrast. The filmmaker may link shots by close graphic similarities, thus making a **graphic match**. Shapes, colors, overall composition, or movement in shot A may be picked up in the composition of shot B. A minimal instance is the cut that joins the first two shots of David Byrne's *True Stories* (6.9, 6.10). More dynamic graphic matches appear in Akira Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai*. After the samurai have first arrived at the village, an alarm sounds and they race to discover its source. Kurosawa cuts together six shots of different running samurai, all very brief and graphically matched (6.11–6.13). Filmmakers sometimes call attention to graphic matches at transitional moments (6.14–6.16).



6.14



6.15



6.16

6.14–6.16 Graphic matching in a transition. In *Aliens*, the curved outline of Ripley's sleeping face (6.14) is graphically matched by means of a dissolve (6.15) to the outline of the earth (6.16).



6.17



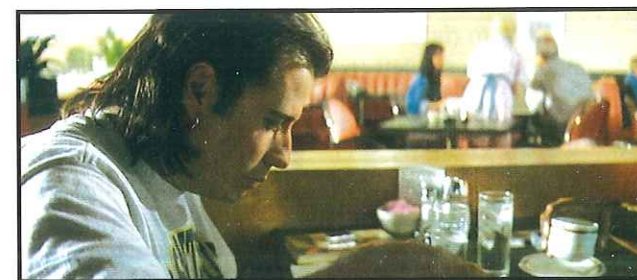
6.18

6.17–6.18 Graphic matching: A matter of degree. The woman and her friend, the cowboy truck driver (6.17), confront the enraged cook and his assistants. (6.18) Although the shots aren't precisely matched graphically, the key characters are placed in the same area of each shot.

Such precise graphic matching is rare. A looser graphic continuity from shot A to shot B is typical of most narrative cinema, as in the *Birds* shots. The director will usually strive to keep the main point of interest roughly constant across the cut, to maintain the overall lighting level, and to avoid strong color clashes from shot to shot. In Juzo Itami's *Tampopo*, an aspiring cook is trying to learn the secret of good noodles, and she questions a successful cook. Alternating shots keep each main character's face in the right center of each frame (6.17, 6.18).

Editing need not be graphically continuous. Filmmakers working in a widescreen format often create mild graphic discontinuities when they frame characters facing one another. A scene from *Pulp Fiction* places the two hit men opposite each other in a restaurant booth, each framed distinctly off-center (6.19, 6.20). Compared to the *Tampopo* example, the cut here creates greater graphic discontinuity. Yet the overall effect is one of symmetry and balance, with each man filling the space left empty in the other shot.

Graphically discontinuous editing can be more noticeable. Orson Welles frequently sought a clash from shot to shot. In *Citizen Kane* a direct cut from the dark long shot of Kane's bedroom gives way to the bright opening title of "News on the March." Welles does something similar during a transition in *Touch of Evil* (6.21, 6.22). Alain Resnais's *Night and Fog* created a convention by utilizing an extreme graphic conflict between past and present. Resnais cut together color footage of an abandoned concentration camp today with black-and-white newsreel shots of the camps in the period 1942–1945.

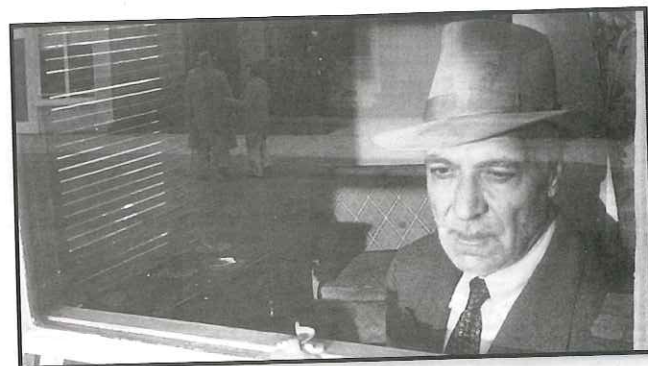


6.19

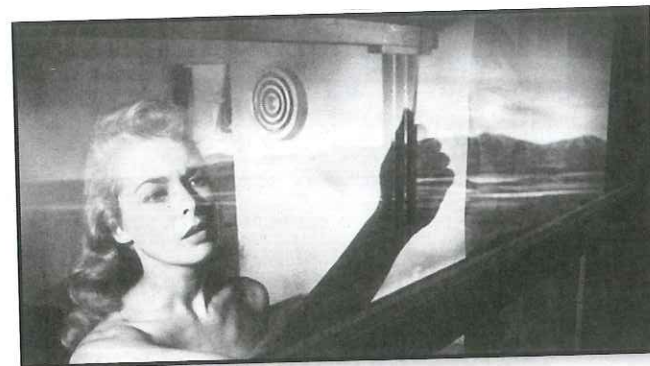


6.20

6.19–6.20 Graphic discontinuity yields editing symmetry. *Pulp Fiction*: Vincent (6.19) and Jules (6.20) are at opposite ends of the screen in each shot, but the cutting creates an overall balance. It also offers our attention a predictable, left-right trajectory to follow.



6.21



6.22

6.21–6.22 Graphic discontinuity in a transition. In *Touch of Evil*, Welles dissolves from a shot of Menzies looking out a window on frame right (6.21) to a shot of Susan Vargas looking out a different window on frame left (6.22). The clash is emphasized by the contrasting screen positions of the window reflections.

Graphic Contrast in *The Birds* Later in the *Birds* sequence, Hitchcock exploits a stronger conflict of graphic qualities. Gasoline spurring from the pump has flowed across the street to a parking lot. Melanie, along with several other people at the restaurant window, has seen a man accidentally set the gasoline alight. His car ignites, and an explosion of flame engulfs him. Melanie must watch helplessly as the flame races along the trail of gas toward the station. Hitchcock cuts the shots as shown in 6.23–6.33:

Shot 30	(Long shot)	High angle. Melanie's POV. Flaming car, spreading flames (6.23).	73 frames
Shot 31	(Medium close-up)	Straight-on angle. Melanie, immobile, looking off left, mouth open (6.24).	20 frames
Shot 32	(Medium shot)	High angle. Melanie's POV. Pan with flames moving from lower right to upper left of trail of gasoline (6.25).	18 frames
Shot 33	(Medium close-up)	As 31. Melanie, immobile, staring down left center (6.26).	16 frames
Shot 34	(Medium shot)	High angle. Melanie's POV. Pan with flames moving from lower right to upper left (6.27).	14 frames
Shot 35	(Medium close-up)	As 31. Melanie, immobile, looking off right, staring aghast (6.28).	12 frames
Shot 36	(Long shot)	Melanie's POV. Gas station. Flames rush in from right. Mitch, sheriff, and attendant run out left (6.29).	10 frames
Shot 37	(Medium close-up)	As 31. Melanie, immobile, stares off extreme right (6.30).	8 frames
Shot 38	(Long shot)	As 36. Melanie's POV. Cars at station explode (6.31).	34 frames
Shot 39	(Medium close-up)	As 31. Melanie covers her face with her hands (6.32).	33 frames
Shot 40	(Extreme long shot)	Extreme high angle on city, flaming trail in center. Gulls fly into shot (6.33).	



6.23 Shot 30



6.24 Shot 31



6.25 Shot 32



6.26 Shot 33



6.27 Shot 34



6.28 Shot 35



6.29 Shot 36



6.30 Shot 37



6.31 Shot 38



6.32 Shot 39



6.33 Shot 40

6.23–6.33 Editing for graphic contrast in *The Birds*. Hitchcock employs two types of contrast. First, his cutting contrasts the movement of Melanie's head with the trail of flames. A second contrast is between movement and stillness. The shots of the flames show movement of both the subject and the camera, while the shots of Melanie's head are completely static.

In graphic terms, Hitchcock has exploited two types of contrast. First, although each shot's composition centers the action (Melanie's head, the flaming trail), the movements thrust in different directions. In shot 31, Melanie looks to the lower left, but in shot 32, the fire moves to the upper left. In shot 33, Melanie is looking down center, but in shot 34, the flames still move to the upper left, and so on.

More important—and what makes the sequence impossible to recapture on the printed page—is the bold contrast between motion and stasis. The shots of the flames present plenty of movement: The flames rush along the trail of gasoline, and the camera pans to follow them. But the shots of Melanie could be still photographs, since each one is absolutely static. She doesn't turn her head in any shot, and the

camera doesn't track in or away from her. Instead we get snapshots of her changing attention. By making movement conflict with countermovement and with stillness, Hitchcock has powerfully exploited the graphic possibilities of editing.

Rhythmic Relations between Shot A and Shot B

Every shot is of a certain length, with its series of frames consuming a certain amount of time onscreen. Film-based formats, as we've seen (p. 10), typically run 24 or 25 frames per second. Digital cinema formats run at approximately 24, 25, 30, or 48 frames per second. A shot can be as short as a single frame, or it may be thousands of frames long, running for many minutes when projected. The filmmaker can adjust the lengths of any shot in relation to the shots around it. That choice taps into the *rhythmic* potential of editing. Other film techniques, notably the sound track, contribute to the overall rhythm of the film, as you'd expect. But the patterning of shot lengths contributes considerably to what we intuitively recognize as a film's rhythm.

Flash Frames Sometimes the filmmaker will use shot duration to stress a single moment. In one sequence of *The Road Warrior*, a ferocious gang member head-butts his victim. At the instant of contact, director George Miller cuts in a few frames of pure white. The result is a sudden flash that suggests violent impact. Such *flash-frames* have become conventions of action films. In any genre, flash-frames may mark transitions between segments or signal flashbacks or subjective sequences.

Flash-frames usually provide one-off accents. More commonly, the rhythmic possibilities of editing emerge when several shots in a series form a pattern. By making all the shots more or less the same length, the filmmaker can create a steady beat. Gradually lengthening shots can slow the rhythm, while shorter and shorter shots can accelerate it.

Rhythmic Cutting in *The Birds* Hitchcock's editing builds a distinct rhythm during the gas-station attack we examined earlier. Since *The Birds* was shot on film, our chart provides frame counts based on a 35mm print.

The first shot, the medium shot of Melanie and the men talking (6.5), consumes almost a thousand frames, or about 41 seconds. But the second shot (6.6), which shows Melanie looking out the window, is much shorter—309 frames (about 13 seconds). Even shorter is shot 3 (6.7), which lasts only 55 frames (about 2½ seconds). The fourth shot (6.8), showing Melanie joined by Mitch and the fisherman, lasts only 35 frames (about 1½ seconds). Clearly, Hitchcock is accelerating the pace at the beginning of what will be a tense sequence. This arc of excitement could probably not have been achieved if Hitchcock had handled the action in a single shot.

In what follows, Hitchcock makes the shots fairly short but subordinates the length of the shot to the rhythm of the dialogue and the movement in the images. As a result, shots 5–29 (not shown here) have no fixed pattern of lengths. But once the essential components of the scene have been established, Hitchcock returns to strongly accelerated cutting.

In presenting Melanie's horrified realization of the flames racing from the parking lot to the gas station, shots 30–40 (6.23–6.33) climax the rhythmic intensification of the sequence. As the description on page 222 shows, after the shot of the spreading flames (shot 30, 6.23), each shot decreases in length by 2 frames, from 20 frames (5/6 of a second) to 8 frames—just one-third of a second! Two shots, 38 and 39, then punctuate the sequence with almost identical durations (a little less than 1½ seconds apiece). Shot 40 (6.33), an extreme long shot that lasts over 600 frames, functions as both a pause and a suspenseful preparation for the new attack. The scene's variations in rhythm alternate between rendering the savagery of the attack and generating suspense as we await the next onslaught.

Counting frames isn't something we normally do when watching a film, but as the film flows along we do feel the shifting tempo that's created by the changing



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On the problems of frame-counting video versions, see "My name is David, and I'm a frame-counter."

“I noticed a softening in American cinema over the last twenty years, and I think it's a direct influence of TV. I would even say that if you want to make movies today, you'd be better off studying television than film because that's the market. Television has diminished the audience's attention span. It's hard to make a slow, quiet film today. Not that I would want to make a slow, quiet film anyway!”

—Oliver Stone, director

shot durations. In general, by controlling editing rhythm, the filmmaker controls the amount of time we have to grasp and reflect on what we see. A series of rapid shots leaves us little time to think about what we're watching. In the *Birds* sequence, Hitchcock's editing impels the viewer's perception to move at a faster and faster pace. Very quickly we have to grasp the progress of the fire and Melanie's changes in position, and the acceleration builds rising excitement in the scene. Whipping up the spectator through rhythmic editing remains central to action scenes in movies today.

Spatial Relations between Shot A and Shot B

Editing can control graphics and rhythm, but it can also construct film space. When early filmmakers discovered this, they grew giddy with their godlike power. “I am builder,” wrote Soviet documentarist Dziga Vertov. “I have placed you . . . in an extraordinary room which did not exist until just now when I also created it. In this room there are twelve walls, shot by me in various parts of the world. In bringing together shots of walls and details, I've managed to arrange them in an order that is pleasing.”

We can understand why Vertov was elated. Editing permits the filmmaker to juxtapose *any* two points in space and suggest some kind of relationship between them.

Establishing and Manipulating Space If you're the director, you might start with a shot that establishes a spatial whole and follow this with a shot of a part of this space. This is what Hitchcock does in shot 1 and shot 2 of the *Birds* sequence (6.5, 6.6): a medium shot of the group of people followed by a medium close-up shot of only one, Melanie. Such *analytical* breakdown is a very common editing pattern.

Alternatively, you could construct a whole space out of component parts. Hitchcock does this in the *Birds* sequence too. Note that in 6.5–6.8 and in shots 30–39 (6.23–6.32), we don't see an establishing shot including Melanie *and* the gas station. In production, the restaurant window need not have been across from the station at all; they could have been filmed in different towns or even countries. Yet the cutting, along with hints in the staging and on the sound track, compels us to believe that Melanie is across the street from the gas station.

Spatial manipulation of this sort is fairly common. In documentaries compiled from newsreel footage, for example, one shot might show a cannon firing, and another shot might show a shell hitting its target. We infer that the cannon fired the shell, though the shots may show entirely different battles. If a shot of a speaker is followed by a shot of a cheering crowd, we assume that they're in the same place.

Today's editors can also alter space through *intra-frame editing*. Digital filmmaking makes it easy to combine parts of different shots into a single shot. In 35mm film-based production, this effect was accomplished during filming or during laboratory work, as with traveling mattes (p. 175). Now elements from different shots may be blended in editing. A character can be extracted from one shot and seamlessly pasted into another one. Vertov, who was fond of layering his images, would have found this software irresistible for creating tricks and lyrical effects (p. 433), but most mainstream filmmakers use intra-frame editing to generate shots that look like normally photographed ones.

Constructive Editing: The Kuleshov Effect Practicing filmmakers sometimes reflect on their tools and their craft. Take Lev Kuleshov, a master of silent cinema. As a teenager, he had worked as an actor and set designer for one of Russia's greatest directors, Yevgenii Bauer. Bauer relied on skillful staging and long takes (p. 144), but when Kuleshov directed his first film at age 21, he modeled it on the faster-cut American films he admired. At the same time, Kuleshov wanted to study filmmaking scientifically, so in 1921 he conducted some informal experiments. His findings decisively demonstrated editing's power over the viewer's sense of space.

“[In editing *The Dark Knight* for both Imax and 35mm presentation], we needed to extensively test to ensure that the cuts were not so quick that the audience would get disoriented, looking at that Imax screen, and at the same time not interfere with the pace of the standard cinema version.”

—Lee Smith, editor



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For more on the Kuleshov effect in both older and more recent films, see “What happens between shots happens between your ears.” We also have a video lecture on the subject, linked in “News! A video essay on constructive editing.”

In one experiment Kuleshov intercut neutral shots of an actor’s face with other shots. When the face was intercut with a bowl of soup, viewers reportedly said the man looked hungry. When the same facial shot was intercut with a dead woman, he was taken to look mournful. Kuleshov claimed that the editing made viewers assume that the actor’s expression changed, so that the cutting actually created the performance. In addition, the editing pattern strongly suggested the man was reacting to nearby things that he could see. Similarly, Kuleshov cut together shots of actors “looking at each other” but on Moscow streets miles apart, then meeting and strolling together—and turning to look at the White House in Washington.

Many filmmakers had already discovered this editing tactic, but because Kuleshov called attention to it, film historians called it the *Kuleshov effect*. In general, that term refers to cutting together portions of a space in a way that prompts the spectator to assume a spatial whole that isn’t shown onscreen. Most often, this happens because the filmmaker has decided to withhold an establishing shot. This strategy is also called **constructive editing**, as opposed to the *analytical* editing that breaks an establishing shot into closer views.

The Kuleshov effect has both practical and artistic advantages. For a hospital scene in *Contagion*, Steven Soderbergh did not have to spend time and money shooting an entire emergency room. He suggests the locale with simple close shots of the husband staring as his wife goes into convulsions (6.34, 6.35). We never see the faces of the medical staff, and we don’t even see the actors together in the frame. The artistic benefit of Soderbergh’s creative choice carries us quickly to the heart of the crisis facing the couple.

Once you start to watch for the Kuleshov effect, you’ll find that it’s quite common. Sometimes it’s used to create almost impossible feats. In Corey Yuen Kwai’s *Legend of Fong Sai-Yuk*, a martial-arts bout between the hero and an adept woman begins on a platform but then bursts into their audience. The two warriors fight while balancing on the heads and shoulders of people in the crowd. Most of the shots are rapidly edited and rely on the Kuleshov effect (6.36, 6.37).

More radically, the editing can present spatial relations as being ambiguous and uncertain. In Carl Dreyer’s *La Passion de Jeanne d’Arc*, for instance, we know only that Jeanne and the priests are in the same room. Because the neutral white backgrounds and the numerous close-ups provide no orientation to the entire space, we can seldom tell how far apart the characters are or precisely who is beside whom. We’ll see later how films can create even more extreme spatial discontinuities.

The viewer doesn’t normally notice the Kuleshov effect, but a few films call attention to it. Carl Reiner’s *Dead Men Don’t Wear Plaid* mixes shots filmed in the present with shots from Hollywood movies of the 1940s. Thanks to the Kuleshov effect, *Dead Men* creates unified scenes in which Steve Martin converses with characters from other films. In *A Movie*, experimentalist Bruce Conner turns the Kuleshov effect into a visual joke by linking shots scavenged from very different sources (6.38, 6.39).

Temporal Relations between Shot A and Shot B

Like other film techniques, editing can control the time of the action presented in the film. In a narrative film especially, editing usually contributes to the plot’s manipulation of story time. Back in Chapter 3 we pointed out three areas in which plot time can cue the spectator to construct the story time: order, duration, and frequency. Our *Birds* example (6.5–6.8) shows how editing reinforces all three areas of control.

Editing Shapes Chronology First, there is the *order* of presentation of events. The men talk, then Melanie turns away, then she sees the gull swoop, then she responds. Hitchcock’s editing presents these story events in the 1-2-3-4 order of his shots. But he could have shuffled the shots into any order at all, even reverse (4-3-2-1). This is to say that the filmmaker may control story chronology through the editing.



6.34



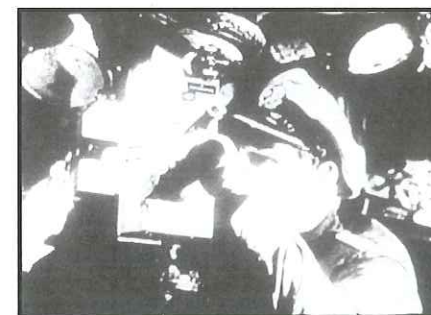
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6.36



6.37



6.38

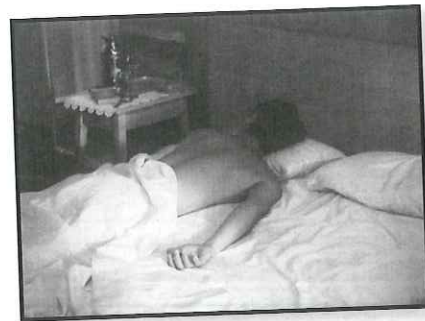


6.39

6.34–6.39 The Kuleshov effect enhances drama, stunts, and jokes. In *Contagion*, a husband (6.34) watches his wife dying (6.35), with no wide view establishing the ER. In *The Legend of Fong Sai-Yuk*, a shot of the woman’s upper body (6.36) is followed by a shot of her legs and feet, supported by unwilling bystanders (6.37). In production, shots of the feet were made while the combatants were suspended above the crowd. The upper-body shots were filmed while the actors stood on some support below the frameline. In the found-footage film *A Movie*, one sequence cuts from a submarine captain peering through a periscope (6.38) to a woman gazing at the camera, as if they could see each other (6.39).

Controlling chronology can affect story-plot relations. We are most familiar with such manipulations in *flashbacks*, which present one or more shots out of their presumed story order. In *Hiroshima mon amour*, Resnais uses the protagonist’s memory to motivate a violation of 1-2-3 order. Three shots (6.40–6.42) suggest visually that the position of her current lover’s hand triggers a recollection of another lover’s death years before. In contemporary cinema, brief flashbacks to key events may brutally interrupt present-time action. *The Fugitive* uses this technique to return obsessively to the murder of Dr. Kimble’s wife, the event that initiated the story’s action.

A much rarer option for reordering story events is the **flashforward**. Here the editing moves from the present to a future event and then returns to the present. A small-scale instance occurs in *The Godfather*. Don Vito Corleone talks with his sons Tom and Sonny about their upcoming meeting with Sollozzo, the gangster who is asking them to finance his narcotics traffic. As the Corleones talk, shots of their conversation in the present are interspersed with shots of Sollozzo going to the



6.40



6.41



6.42

6.40–6.42 Editing creates a flashback. In *Hiroshima mon amour*, an optical point-of-view shot shows the protagonist's Japanese lover asleep (6.40). This is followed by a shot of her looking at him (6.41) and then a jump back into her past: a similar view of the hand of her dead German lover (6.42).

“I saw *Toto the Hero*, the first film of the Belgian ex-circus clown Jaco van Dormael. What a brilliant debut. He tells the story with the camera. His compression and ellipses and clever visual transitions make it one of the most cinematic movies in a long time. The story spans a lifetime and kaleidoscopic events with such a lightness and grace that you want to get up and cheer.”

—John Boorman, director

meeting in the future (6.43–6.45). The editing is used to provide exposition about Sollozzo while also moving quickly to the Don's announcement, at the gangsters' meeting, that he will not involve the family in the drug trade.

Filmmakers may use flashforwards to tease the viewer with glimpses of the eventual outcome of the story action. The end of *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* is hinted at in brief shots that periodically interrupt scenes in the present. Such flashforwards create a sense of a narration with a powerful range of story knowledge.

Editing Condenses or Expands Duration Filmmakers almost always present their shots in chronological order, but they are more likely to use editing to alter the *duration* of story events. **Elliptical editing** presents an action in such a way that it consumes less time on the screen than it does in the story. The filmmaker can create an *ellipsis* in three principal ways.



6.43



6.44



6.45

6.43–6.45 Editing creates a flashforward. In *The Godfather*, the Corleones discuss their upcoming meeting with Sollozzo (6.43). Jump ahead in time: Sollozzo arrives at the meeting, greeted by Sonny (6.44). The next few shots return us to the family conversation, where Don Vito ponders what he will tell Sollozzo (6.45). As they talk, more flashforwards to the meeting are inserted.

Suppose you want to show a man climbing a flight of stairs but you don't want to show every second of his climb. You could simply cut from a shot of him starting up the stairs to a shot of him reaching the top. If you feel that's a little too bumpy for your viewer, you could use a dissolve or some other punctuation that signals that some time has been omitted. This was a common option in world cinema before the 1960s. Devices like dissolves, fades, and wipes conventionally signaled an ellipsis in the action.

Alternatively, you could show the man at the bottom of the staircase, let him walk up out of the frame, hold briefly on the empty frame, then cut to an empty frame of the top of the stairs and let the man enter the frame. The *empty frames* on either side of the cut cover the elided time.

As a third option, you could create an ellipsis by means of a *cutaway* or *insert*. This is a shot of another event elsewhere that will not last as long as the elided action. In our example, you might start with the man climbing but then cut away to a woman in her apartment. You could then cut back to the man much farther along in his climb.

If you start to watch for them, you'll see that ellipses are fairly common in editing. Less common are shot-changes that *expand* story time. If the action from the end of one shot is partly repeated at the beginning of the next, we have **overlapping editing**. This prolongs the action, stretching it out past its story duration. The Russian filmmakers of the 1920s made frequent use of temporal expansion through overlapping editing, and no one mastered it more thoroughly than Sergei Eisenstein. In *Strike*, when factory workers bowl over a foreman with a large wheel hanging from a crane, two shots expand the action (6.46–6.48). In *October*, Eisenstein overlaps several shots of rising bridges in order to stress the significance of the moment.

Editing Can Repeat Story Actions We're accustomed to seeing a scene present action only once. Occasionally, however, a filmmaker may go beyond expanding an action to repeat it in its entirety. The very rarity of this technique may make it a powerful editing resource. In Bruce Conner's *Report*, there is a newsreel shot of John and Jacqueline Kennedy riding a limousine down a Dallas street. The shot is systematically repeated, in part or in whole, over and over, building up tension as the event seems to move by tiny increments closer to the inevitable assassination. Occasionally in *Do The Right Thing*, Spike Lee cuts together two takes of the same action, as when we twice see a garbage can fly through the air and break the pizzeria window at the start of the riot. Jackie Chan often shows his most virtuoso stunts three or four times in a row from different angles to allow the audience to marvel at his daring (6.49–6.51).



6.46



6.47



6.48

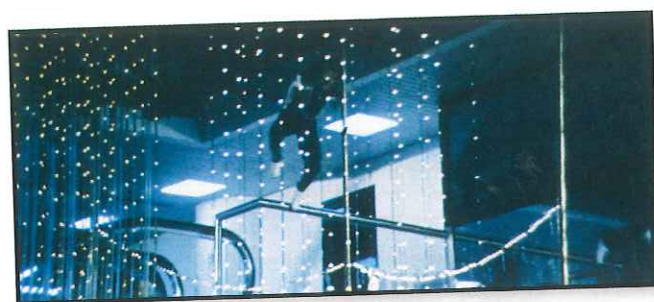
6.46–6.48 Expanding duration through cutting. In *Strike*, a wheel swings toward the foreman (6.46). From another angle we see it swing toward him again (6.47), and then again before striking him (6.48).

“[In editing James Bond films], we also evolved a technique that jumped continuity by simple editing devices. Bond would take a half-step towards a door and you would pick him up stepping into the next scene. We also used inserts cleverly to speed up a scene.”

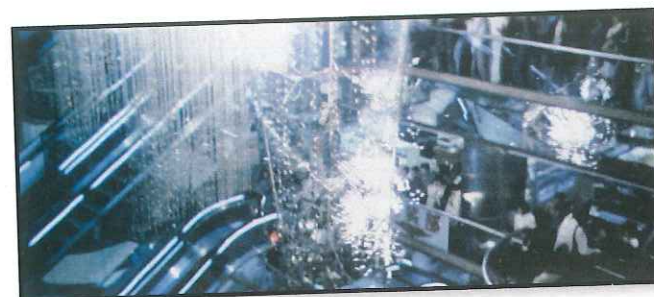
—John Glen, editor and director

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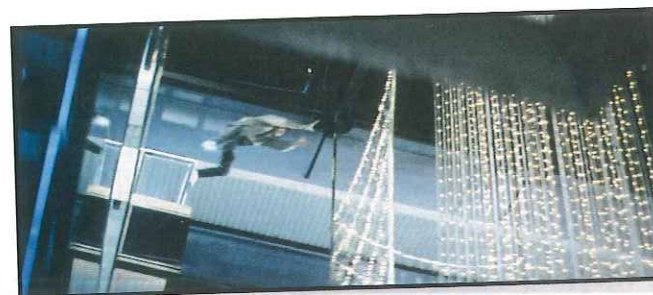
Sit in on an editing session for Johnnie To's *The Mad Detective* and see why certain cuts were chosen in “Truly madly cinematically.”



6.49



6.50



6.51

6.49–6.51 Editing and the replay. In *Police Story*, chasing the gangsters through a shopping mall, Jackie Chan leaps onto a pole several stories above them (6.49). He slides down in a shower of exploding lights (6.50). Cut to a new angle: Jackie leaps again, leading to an instant replay of the risky stunt (6.51). While the *Strike* sequence (6.46–6.48) briefly repeats bits of an action to extend a moment, this sequence from *Police Story* plays out an entire action several times.

Graphics, rhythm, space, and time are at the service of the filmmaker through the technique of editing. They offer potentially unlimited creative possibilities, which is to say they offer a vast menu of choices. Yet most films we see make use of a particular set of editing possibilities. This menu of choices is called **continuity editing**, and it has dominated film history for nearly a hundred years. We look at that next. Still, the most familiar way to edit a film isn't the only way to edit a film, and so we'll go on to consider some alternatives to this tradition.



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We discuss the emergence of continuity editing in many entries, particularly “John Ford, silent man,” “Back to the vaults, and over the edge,” and “Looking different today?” A young filmmaker’s multiscreen study of early editing is discussed in “A variation on a sunbeam: Exploring a Griffith Biograph film.”

Continuity Editing

Around 1900–1910, as filmmakers started to explore editing, they tried to arrange their shots so as to tell a story clearly. They developed an approach to editing, supported by specific strategies of cinematography and mise-en-scene, that was based on *narrative continuity*. Their explorations coalesced into a consistent style at the end of the 1910s, and it was embraced by filmmakers around the world. If you want to become a director, a cinematographer, a performer, or an editor, you will need an intimate understanding of continuity editing.

We’ve seen that when a film technique is chosen and patterned to fulfill certain functions, a style emerges. Continuity editing offers a good example. It’s a patterned use of a technique, based on filmmakers’ decisions, that’s designed to have particular effects on viewers. As its name implies, the continuity style aims to transmit narrative information smoothly and clearly over a series of shots. This makes the editing play a role in narration, the moment-by-moment flow of story information.

All the dimensions of editing play a role in the continuity style. First, filmmakers usually keep graphic qualities roughly continuous from shot to shot. The figures are balanced and symmetrically deployed in the frame; the overall lighting tonality remains constant; the action occupies the central zones of the screen.

Second, filmmakers usually adjust the rhythm of the cutting to the scale of the shots. Long shots are left on the screen longer than medium shots, and medium shots are left on longer than close-ups. This gives the spectator more time to take in the broader views, which contain more details. By contrast, scenes of accelerated editing like the fire in *The Birds* favor closer views that can be absorbed quickly.



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Sometimes a simple cut straight in can be very powerful. We discuss these “axial cuts” (that is, cuts along the lens axis) in “Kurosawa’s early spring” and “Sometimes two shots. . . .”

Above all, since the continuity style seeks to present a story clearly and forcefully, the filmmakers’ editing choices shape space and time in particular ways.

Spatial Continuity: The 180° System

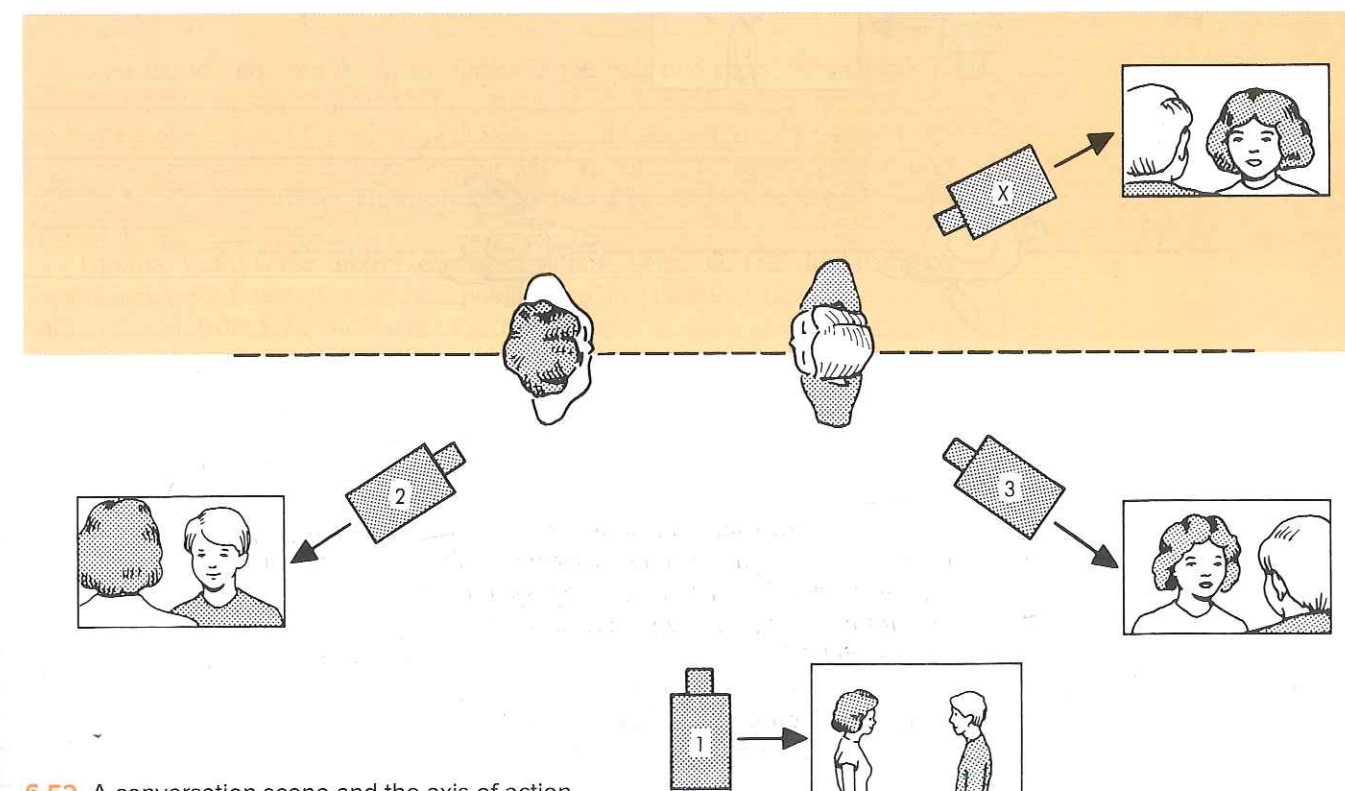
When working in the continuity style, the filmmaker builds the scene’s space around what is called the **axis of action**, the *center line*, or the *180° line*. Any action—a person walking, two people conversing, a car racing along a road—can be thought of as occurring along a line or vector. This axis of action determines a half-circle, or 180° area, where the camera can be placed to present the action. The filmmaker will plan, stage, shoot, and edit the shots so as to maintain the axis of action from shot to shot.

The **180° system** can be imagined as the bird’s-eye view in 6.52. A girl and a boy are talking. The axis of action is the imaginary line connecting them. Under the continuity system, the director would arrange the mise-en-scene and camera placement so as to establish and sustain this line. A typical series of shots for continuity editing of the scene would be these:

1. A medium shot of the girl and the boy in profile.
2. A shot over the girl’s shoulder, favoring the boy.
3. A shot over the boy’s shoulder, favoring the girl.

So far, so simple. But the choices are limited. To cut to a shot from camera position X, or from any position within the tinted area, would be considered a violation of the system because it *crosses* the axis of action. Indeed, some handbooks of film directing call shot X flatly wrong. To see why, we need to examine what happens when a filmmaker follows the 180° system.

The *180° system ensures that relative positions in the frame remain consistent*. In the shots taken from camera positions 1, 2, and 3, the characters occupy the same areas of the frame relative to each other. Even though we see them from different angles, the girl is always on the left and the boy is always on the right. But if we



6.52 A conversation scene and the axis of action.

cut to shot X, the characters will switch positions in the frame. An advocate of traditional continuity would claim that shot X confuses us: Have the two characters somehow swiveled around each other?

The 180° system ensures consistent eyelines. If maintaining the axis of action keeps the figures facing in consistent directions, that has implications for the characters' gazes. In shots 1, 2, and 3, the girl is looking right and the boy is looking left. Shot X violates this pattern by making the girl look to the left.

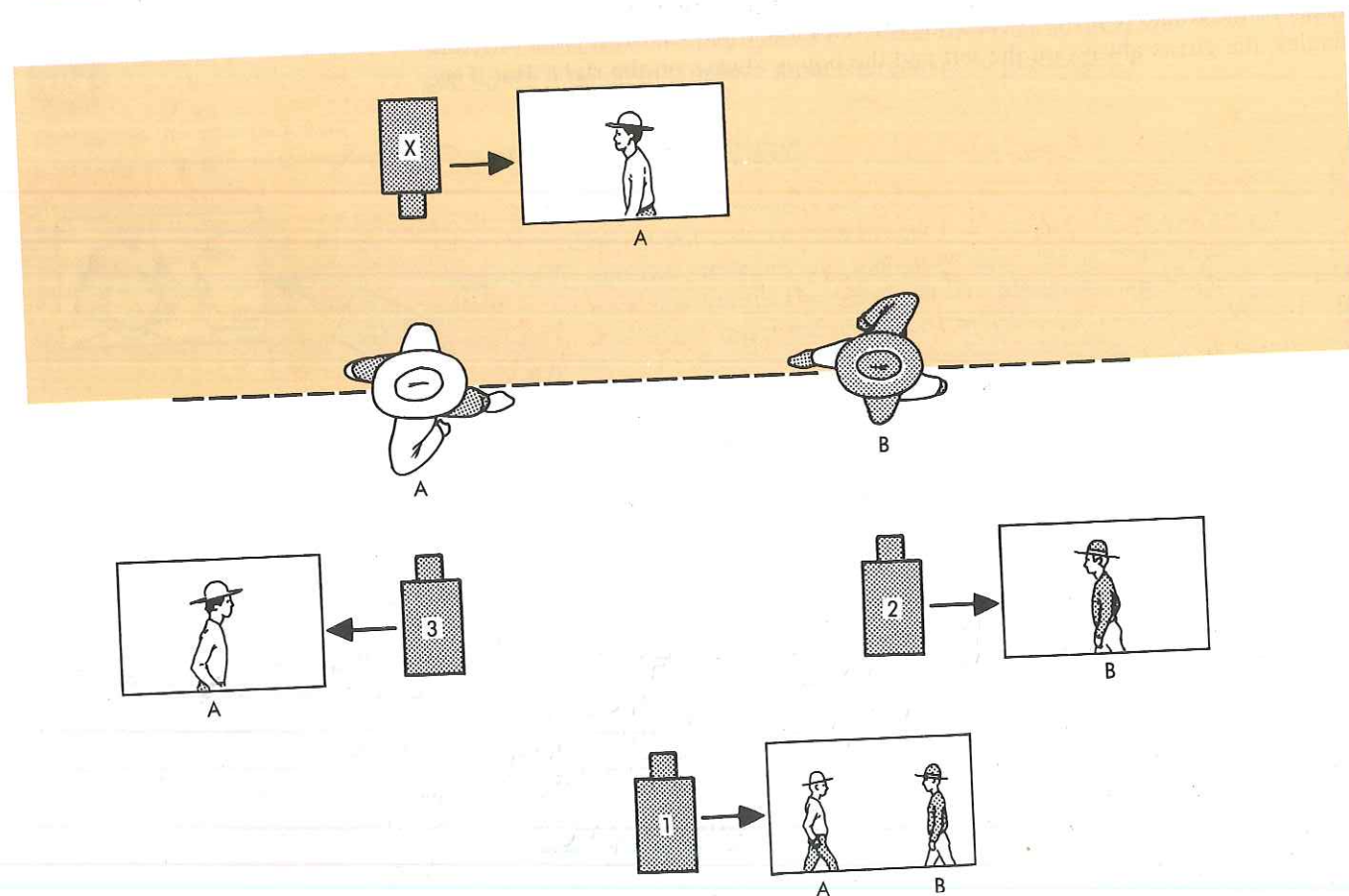
The 180° system ensures consistent screen direction. Now imagine that the girl is walking left to right; her path constitutes the axis of action. As long as our shots do not cross this axis, cutting them together will keep the screen direction of the girl's movement constant, from left to right. But if we cross the axis and film a shot from the other side, the girl will now appear on the screen as moving from right to left. Such a cut could be disorienting.

Visualize a standard scene of two cowboys meeting for a shootout on a town street (6.53). Cowboy A and cowboy B form the 180° line. But here A is walking from left to right and B is approaching from right to left, both seen in the shot taken from camera position 1. A closer view, from camera position 2, shows B still moving from right to left. A third shot, from camera position 3, shows A walking, as he had been in the first shot, from left to right.

Now imagine that the third shot was instead taken from position X, on the opposite side of the line. A is now seen as moving from right to left. Has he lost his nerve and turned around while the second shot, of B, was on the screen? The filmmakers may want us to think that he is still walking toward his adversary, but the change in screen directions could make us think just the opposite. A cut to a shot taken from any point in the colored area would create this change in direction. Such breaks in continuity can be confusing.

“I saw David Lynch and asked him: ‘What’s this about crossing the axis?’ And he burst out laughing and said, ‘That always gets me.’ And I asked if you could do it, and he gave me this startled look and said, ‘Stephen, you can do anything. You’re a director.’ Then he paused and said, ‘But it doesn’t cut together.’”

—Stephen King, novelist, on directing his first film, *Maximum Overdrive*



6.53 A Western shootout and the axis of action.

It would be even more disorienting to cross the line as the scene's action is starting. In our shootout, suppose we didn't include an establishing shot but simply started with shot X, showing cowboy A walking from right to left. Suppose we follow that with shot 2, presenting B (from the other side of the line) also walking right to left. The two cowboys would seem to be walking in the same direction, as if one were following the other. We would very likely be startled if they suddenly came face to face within the framing of setup 1. This suggests that the Kuleshov effect, which omits an establishing shot, works best when it respects a consistent axis of action.

The 180° system prides itself on delineating space clearly. The viewer should always know where the characters are in relation to one another and to the setting. More important, the viewer always knows where he or she is with respect to the story action. The space of the scene, clearly and unambiguously unfolded, does not jar or disorient us. Most filmmakers believe that any disorientation will distract us from the unfolding plot action. We can't build up the story in our minds if we don't understand where characters are in space.

Continuity Editing in *The Maltese Falcon*

Thanks to the 180° principle, filmmakers have employed continuity editing to build up a smoothly flowing space that presents narrative action crisply and clearly. Let's consider a concrete example: the opening of John Huston's *The Maltese Falcon*.

Who's There? Where Are They? The scene begins in the office of detective Sam Spade. In the first two shots, this space is established in several ways. First, there is the office window (shot 1a, 6.54). The camera tilts down to reveal Spade (shot 1b, 6.55) rolling a cigarette. As Spade says, "Yes, sweetheart?" shot 2 (6.56) appears.

This is important in several respects. It serves as an **establishing shot**, delineating the overall space of the office: the door, the intervening area, the desk, and Spade's position. Huston hasn't used a distant profile shot to establish the axis, as in our shot 1 in 6.52. Nonetheless, shot 2 establishes a 180° line between Spade and his secretary, Effie. Effie could be the girl in 6.52, and Spade could be the boy. The first phase of this scene will be built around staying on the same side of this 180° line.

After Huston lays out the space for us in the first two shots, he analyzes it. Shots 3 (6.57) and 4 (6.58) show Effie and Spade talking. Because the 180° line established at the outset is obeyed (each shot presents the two from the same side), we know their location and spatial relationships. In cutting together medium shots of Effie and Spade, however, Huston relies on two other common tactics within the 180° system.

The first tactic is the **shot/reverse-shot** pattern. Once the 180° line has been established, we can show first one end point of the line, then the other. Here we cut back and forth from Effie to Spade.

A reverse shot is not literally the reverse of the first framing. It's simply a shot of the opposite end of the axis of action, usually showing a three-quarters



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How do you edit a simple action like entering a room? We survey some options in "Come in and sit down" and "Alignment, allegiance, and murder."



6.54 *The Maltese Falcon*: shot 1a



6.55 *The Maltese Falcon*: shot 1b



6.56 *The Maltese Falcon*: shot 2

6.57 *The Maltese Falcon*: shot 36.58 *The Maltese Falcon*: shot 4

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For thoughts on the importance of eyeline directions in a very different art form, see "The eyeline match goes way, way back."

view of the subject. In our bird's-eye view diagram (6.52), shots 2 and 3 form a shot/reverse-shot pattern, as 6.55 and 6.56 do here. We've seen examples of shot/reverse-shot cutting earlier in this chapter (6.17; 6.19, 6.20; and 6.34, 6.35).

The second tactic Huston uses here is the **eyeline match**. This occurs when shot A presents someone looking at something offscreen and shot B shows us what is being looked at. In neither shot are *both* looker and object present. In the *Maltese Falcon* opening, the cut from the shot of Effie (shot 3, 6.57) to the shot of Spade at his desk (shot 4, 6.58) is an eyeline match. The shots from *The Birds* of Melanie watching the bird attack and fire also create eyeline matches. So do the examples in which editing balances frame compositions (6.17, 6.18 and 6.19, 6.20).

Note that shot/reverse-shot editing need not employ eyeline matches. You could film both ends of the axis in a shot/reverse-shot pattern without showing both characters looking at each other. (In 6.58, Spade isn't looking at Effie.) On the whole, however, most shot/reverse-shot cuts also utilize the eyeline match.

The eyeline match is a simple idea but a powerful one, since the *directional* quality of the eyeline creates a strong spatial continuity. To be looked at, an object must be near the looker. As you'd expect, the eyeline match plays an important role in constructive editing. The E.R. scene of *Contagion* (6.34, 6.35) makes sense partly because of the husband's shocked stare as he watches his wife's convulsions. In Kuleshov's experiments, the expressionless actor was typically looking at something offscreen. When the next shot revealed the bowl of soup or the White House, the viewer would assume that it was nearby and the actor was reacting to it.

Within the 180° system, the eyeline match, like constant screen direction, can stabilize space. Note how in shot 3, Effie's glance off right confirms Spade's position even though he is not onscreen. And though Spade does not look up after the cut to shot 4, the camera position remains on the same side of the axis of action (indeed, the position is virtually identical to that in shot 1b). We know that Effie is offscreen left. The breakdown of the scene's space is consistent. Thanks to the shot/reverse-shot pattern and the eyeline match, we understand the characters' locations even when they aren't in the same frame.

As we'd expect, the purpose is to make the shots clarify the cause-effect flow of the narrative. Shot 1 has suggested the locale and emphasized the protagonist by linking him to the window sign. The noise of the door and Spade's "Yes, sweetheart?" motivate the cut to shot 2. This establishing shot firmly anchors shot 1 spatially. It also introduces the source of the offscreen sound—the new character, Effie. The shot changes at precisely the moment when Effie enters, so we're unlikely to notice the cut. Our expectations lead us to want to see what happens next.

Shots 3 and 4 present the conversation between Spade and Effie, and the shot/reverse shot and the eyeline match reassure us as to the characters' locations. We may not even notice the cutting, since the style works to emphasize what Effie says and how Spade reacts. In shot 5, the overall view of the office is presented again, precisely at the moment when a new character enters the scene, and this in turn situates her firmly in the space. By adhering to the 180° system, Huston has emphasized the most important narrative elements—the dialogue and the entrance of new characters. The editing subordinates space to the flow of story action.

The Client's Case: Developing the Spatial Layout The overall coherence of the space we see is reaffirmed in shot 5, which presents the same framing as we saw in shot 2. The office is shown again (shot 5a, 6.59), when the new character, Brigid O'Shaughnessy, enters. Spade stands to greet her, and the camera reframes his movement by a slight tilt upward (shot 5b, 6.60). Shot 5 is a **reestablishing shot**, since it reestablishes the overall space that was analyzed into shots 3 and 4. The pattern, then, has been *establishment/breakdown/reestablishment*—one of the most common patterns of spatial editing in the classical continuity style. This is *analytical* editing, cutting that analyzes the space, as opposed to *constructive* editing, which builds up our sense of the space without an establishing shot.

After Brigid has walked toward Spade in shot 5, shot 6 presents a reverse angle on the two of them (shot 6a, 6.61). She sits down alongside his desk (shot 6b, 6.62). Up to this point, the 180° line has run between Spade and the doorway. Now the axis of action runs from Spade to the client's chair by his desk. Once established, this new line will not be violated.

A new tactic for ensuring spatial continuity has been introduced in this passage—the **match on action**, a very powerful device. This is simply a matter of carrying a single movement across a cut. As Brigid approaches Spade's desk at the end of shot 5 (6.60), her movement continues into the beginning of shot 6 (6.61). Again, the 180° system aids in concealing the match, since it keeps screen direction constant: Brigid moves from left to right in both shots. As you'd expect, the match on action is a tool of narrative continuity. So powerful is our desire to follow the action flowing across the cut that we ignore the cut itself.

Making a match on action requires skill. Given two shots of the same action, the editor must decide at what point to interrupt it; choosing the wrong point can make the cut bumpy. Moreover, if a piece of action isn't filmed by two cameras at once, it's likely that the first shot, in which the movement starts, will be filmed much earlier or later than the second. The risk of continuity errors—changes of position, or lighting, or props—is considerable.

After the match on action, the rest of the *Maltese Falcon* scene uses the same editing tactics we've already seen. When Brigid sits down, a new axis of action is established (shot 6b, 6.62). This enables Huston to break down the space into closer shots (shots 7–13, 6.63–6.69). All these shots use the shot/reverse-shot tactic: The camera frames, at an oblique angle, one end point of the 180° line, then frames the other. (Note the shoulders in the foreground of shots 7, 8, and 10—6.63, 6.64, and 6.66.) Here again, the editing of space presents the dialogue action simply and clearly.

Beginning with shot 12, Huston's cuts also create eyeline matches. Spade looks off left at Brigid (shot 12, 6.68). She looks off left as the door is heard opening (shot 13, 6.69). Archer, just coming in, looks off right at them (shot 14, 6.70), and they both look off at him (shot 15, 6.71). The 180° rule permits us always to know who is looking at whom.

Huston could have played the entire conversation in one long take, remaining with shot 6b (6.62). Why has he broken the conversation into seven shots? As with the gas-station attack in *The Birds*, the cutting controls timing and emphasis. We'll look at Brigid or Spade at exactly the moment Huston wants us to. In a long take and a more distant framing, Huston would have to channel our attention in other ways, perhaps through staging or sound.

Furthermore, the shot/reverse-shot pattern stresses the development of Brigid's story and Spade's reaction to it. As she gets into details, the cutting moves from over-the-shoulder shots (6.63, 6.64) to framings that isolate Brigid (6.65 and 6.67) and eventually one that isolates Spade (6.68). These shots come at the point when Brigid, in an artificially shy manner, tells her story, and the medium close-ups arouse our curiosity

6.59 *The Maltese Falcon*: shot 5a6.60 *The Maltese Falcon*: shot 5b

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Hong Kong combat scenes are fine places to study precise continuity editing. See our entries, "Bond vs. Chan: Jackie shows how it's done" and "Planet Hong Kong: The dragon dances."

6.61 *The Maltese Falcon*: shot 6a6.62 *The Maltese Falcon*: shot 6b

6.63 *The Maltese Falcon*: shot 76.66 *The Maltese Falcon*: shot 106.69 *The Maltese Falcon*: shot 136.64 *The Maltese Falcon*: shot 86.67 *The Maltese Falcon*: shot 116.70 *The Maltese Falcon*: shot 146.65 *The Maltese Falcon*: shot 96.68 *The Maltese Falcon*: shot 126.71 *The Maltese Falcon*: shot 15

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Shots showing characters' reactions are crucial to a film. We talk about this in "They're looking for us."

about whether she's telling the truth. The shot of Spade's reaction (6.68) suggests that he's skeptical. The editing cooperates with framing and acting to focus our attention on Brigid's tale, to let us study her demeanor, and to hint at Spade's response.

When Archer enters, the breakdown into close views stops for a moment, and Huston reestablishes the locale. Archer is integrated into the action by a rightward pan shot (shots 16a and 16b, 6.72 and 6.73). His path is consistent with the scene's first axis of action, that running between Spade and the doorway. Moreover, the framing on him is similar to that used for Brigid's entrance earlier. (Compare shot 16b with 6a, figures 6.73 and 6.61.) Such repetitions allow the viewer to concentrate on the new information, not the manner in which it is presented.

Now firmly established as part of the scene, Archer hitches himself up onto Spade's desk. His position puts him at Spade's end of the axis of action (shot 17, 6.74). During the rest of the scene, Huston's editing analyzes this new set of relationships without ever breaking the 180° line.

By maintaining spatial continuity, filmmakers draw the viewer into the active process of understanding a scene. We assume that setting, character movement, and character position will be consistent and coherent. We make inferences on the basis of cues, so that when Brigid and Spade look off left, we infer that someone is entering the room, and we expect to see a shot of that person. We also form expectations about what shot will follow the one we're seeing.

6.72 *The Maltese Falcon*: shot 16a6.73 *The Maltese Falcon*: shot 16b6.74 *The Maltese Falcon*: shot 17

We do this without noticing all the things that we've analyzed. Throughout, the shots present space to emphasize the cause-effect flow—the characters' movements, words, and facial reactions. The editing has created spatial continuity in order to present ongoing story action.

Continuity Editing: Some Fine Points

The continuity system, largely unchanged, remains in force today. Most narrative films still draw on 180° principles (6.75, 6.76). But the system can be refined in various ways.

Characters in a Circle, Shifting the Axis If a director arranges several characters in a circular pattern—say, sitting around a dinner table—then the axis of action will probably run between the characters of greatest importance at the moment. In 6.77 and 6.78, from Howard Hawks's *Bringing Up Baby*, the important dialogue is occurring between the two men, so we can cut to positions around Aunt Elizabeth (in the foreground) to get consistent shot/reverse shots. When David Huxley leaves the table, however, the new arrangement of characters creates a new axis of action running between the two women (6.79, 6.80).

Both the *Maltese Falcon* and the *Bringing Up Baby* examples show that in the course of a scene the 180° line may shift as the characters move around the setting. In some cases, the filmmaker may create a new axis of action that allows the camera to take up a position that would have crossed the line in an earlier phase of the scene.

Deleting the Establishing Shot The power of the axis of action and the eyelines it can create is so great that the filmmaker may be able to eliminate an establishing shot, thus relying on the Kuleshov effect. In Spike Lee's *She's Gotta Have It*, Nola Darling holds a Thanksgiving dinner for her three male friends. Lee

“The way [Howard] Hawks constructs a continuity of space is remarkable, and generally holds you ‘inside’ it. There is no possible way of escape, unless the film decides to provide you with one. My theory is that his films are captivating because they build a sense of continuity which is so strong that it allows the complete participation of the audience.”

—Slobodan Sijan, director



6.75



6.76

6.75–6.76 Continuity editing in today's cinema. A train conversation in Duncan Jones' *Source Code* obeys the 180° system, with eyeline matches and foreground shoulders confirming our position on one side of the axis. The arrangement is similar to the one we show in 6.52, and to the staging and cutting in the *Maltese Falcon* scene.

6.77–6.80 Continuity around the dinner table. In *Bringing Up Baby*, shot/reverse-shot cutting puts the distracted David Huxley on the right (6.77) and Major Applegate on the left (6.78). After David leaves the table, a new axis is established along the length of the table. This permits a shot/reverse-shot exchange favoring first Aunt Elizabeth (6.79) and then Susan (6.80).



6.77



6.78



6.79



6.80



6.81



6.82



6.83



6.84



6.85



6.86

6.81–6.86 Around the table with constructive editing: *She's Gotta Have It*. The first shot, more or less from Nola's point of view, lays out the men's position at the table (6.81). Sometimes a momentary axis of action is established between the men (6.82). Nola is never shown in the same frame with her suitors, but her eyelines always tell us whom she's looking at (6.83). When the men look at her, each one's eyeline is consistent with their initial position at the table (6.84–6.85). In the last frame shown (6.86), we get an optical POV from Nola's position, as Greer addresses her directly. The scene develops without an establishing shot showing all four characters.

never presents a shot showing all four in the same frame. Instead, he uses medium long shots including all the men (for example, 6.81), over-the-shoulder shot/reverse shots among them (for example, 6.82), and eyeline-matched medium close-ups of them. Nola is given her own medium close-ups (6.83).

Through eyelines and body orientations, Lee's editing keeps the spatial relations completely consistent. For example, each man looks in a different direction when addressing Nola (6.84–6.86). This cutting pattern enhances the dramatic

action by making all the men equal competitors for her. They are clustered at one end of the table, and none is shown in the same frame with her. By organizing the scene around her orientation to the action Lee keeps Nola the pivotal character. The men are on display, and Nola is coolly judging each one's behavior.

Cheating with Cuts Another felicity in the 180° system is the **cheat cut**. Sometimes a director may not have perfect continuity from shot to shot because each shot was composed for specific reasons. Must the two shots match perfectly? Again, narrative motivation decides the matter. If we're paying attention to the unfolding action and the 180° relations are kept reasonably constant, the director has some freedom to "cheat" mise-en-scene from shot to shot—that is, to slightly mismatch the positions of characters or objects.

Consider two shots from William Wyler's *Jezebel*. Neither Julie nor Pres moves during the shots, but Wyler has blatantly cheated the position of Julie (6.87, 6.88). Yet most viewers would not notice the discrepancy since it's the dialogue that is paramount in the scene. The shots are consistent with the axis of action, and the change from a straight-on angle to a slightly high angle helps hide the cheat. There is, in fact, a cheat in the *Maltese Falcon* scene, too, between shots 6b and 7. In 6b (6.62), as Spade leans forward, the back of his chair is not near him. Yet in shot 7 (6.63), it has been cheated to be just behind his left arm. Here again, the narrative flow overrides the cheat cut.

Crossing the Axis Most continuity-based filmmakers prefer not to cross the axis of action. They would rather move the actors around the setting and create a new axis, as we saw in *The Maltese Falcon*. Still, can you ever legitimately cut to the other side of an established axis of action?

Yes, sometimes. A scene occurring in a doorway, on a staircase, or in other symmetrical settings may occasionally break the line. More often, filmmakers get across the axis by taking one shot *on the line itself* and using it as a transition. This strategy is rare in dialogue sequences, but it's common in chase scenes. By filming on the axis, the filmmaker presents the action as moving directly toward the camera (a *head-on* shot) or away from it (a *tail-on* shot). The climactic chase of *The Road Warrior* offers several examples. As marauding road gangs try to board a fleeing gasoline truck, George Miller uses many head-on and tail-on shots of the vehicles (6.89–6.93).

Filmmakers occasionally violate screen direction without confusing the viewer. They can do this most easily when a scene's physical layout is very well defined. During a chase in John Ford's *Stagecoach*, no confusion arises when the Ringo Kid leaps from the coach to the horses (6.94, 6.95). We aren't likely to think that the coach had swiveled to face in the opposite direction, as in the possible misinterpretation of the two cowboys' shootout (6.53).



6.87



6.88

6.87–6.88 The cheat cut. In this shot from *Jezebel*, the top of Julie's head is even with Pres's chin (6.87), but in the second shot (6.88) she seems to have grown.



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Another refinement: What happens if a reverse shot is withheld? We show some examples and discuss their functions in "Angles and perceptions."



6.89



6.91

6.89–6.93 Crossing the axis of action. Near the climax of the chase in *The Road Warrior*, Max is driving the tanker left to right (6.89). In later shots he is still driving toward the right. An attacking thug perched on the front of the truck turns and looks off right in horror (6.90). The chieftain's vehicle, moving right to left, is coming toward them on a collision course (6.91). The crash is shown in several quick shots facing head-on to the vehicles (6.92). These head-on shots provide a transition to cross the axis, so that a long shot can now show Max's truck plowing through the wreckage from right to left (6.93)—opposite to the direction we've seen in earlier shots.



6.90



6.92



6.93



6.94

6.94–6.95 Breaking the axis successfully. In *Stagecoach*, in a long shot where all movement is toward the right, the hero begins leaping from the driver's seat down onto the horse team (6.94). In the next shot both he and the coach are moving leftward (6.95).



6.95

On the Axis: The POV Shot There's one more fine point with respect to spatial continuity, and it's especially relevant to a film's narration. We have already seen that a camera framing can strongly indicate a character's optical point of view, making the narration subjective. We saw this in our earlier example from *Fury* (p. 192). That example presents a cut from the person looking (5.119)

to what he sees (5.120). We have also seen an instance of POV cutting in the *Birds* sequence (pp. 218–219). Now we're in a position to see how optical POV is consistent with continuity editing, creating the type of eyeline-match editing known as *point-of-view cutting*.

CREATIVE DECISIONS

Are You Looking at Me? Point-of-View Cutting in Rear Window

The eyeline match shows a person looking in one shot, followed by a shot showing what the person sees. Most eyeline matches, however, don't show the object of the look from the person's vantage point. When Effie looks at Sam Spade (6.57, 6.58) or when Brigid looks off at Archer (6.69, 6.70), the followup shot doesn't represent the character's point of view. By contrast, POV cutting gives us an eyeline match that presents something *as seen by the person looking*. The shot is more or less optically subjective. This option doesn't violate the 180° system because the subjective shot is taken from a position presumed to be right *on* the axis of action.

Again Alfred Hitchcock provides clear examples. *Rear Window* is built on a Peeping Tom situation. The photojournalist Jeff is laid up with a broken leg, so he watches life across the courtyard behind his apartment. He starts to wonder if his neighbor has murdered his wife, but he can't go over to investigate. He's confined to whatever clues he can spot from his window.

Throughout the film Hitchcock uses a standard eyeline-match pattern, cutting from a shot of Jeff looking (6.96) to a shot of what he sees (6.97). Since there is no establishing shot that shows both Jeff and the opposite apartment, the Kuleshov effect operates here: Our mind connects the two parts of space, as in our *Birds* POV sequences. More specifically, the second shot represents Jeff's optical viewpoint, and this is filmed from a position on his end of the axis of action (6.98). The camera has not crossed the line. Through POV editing, the narration restricts us to what Jeff sees and hears.

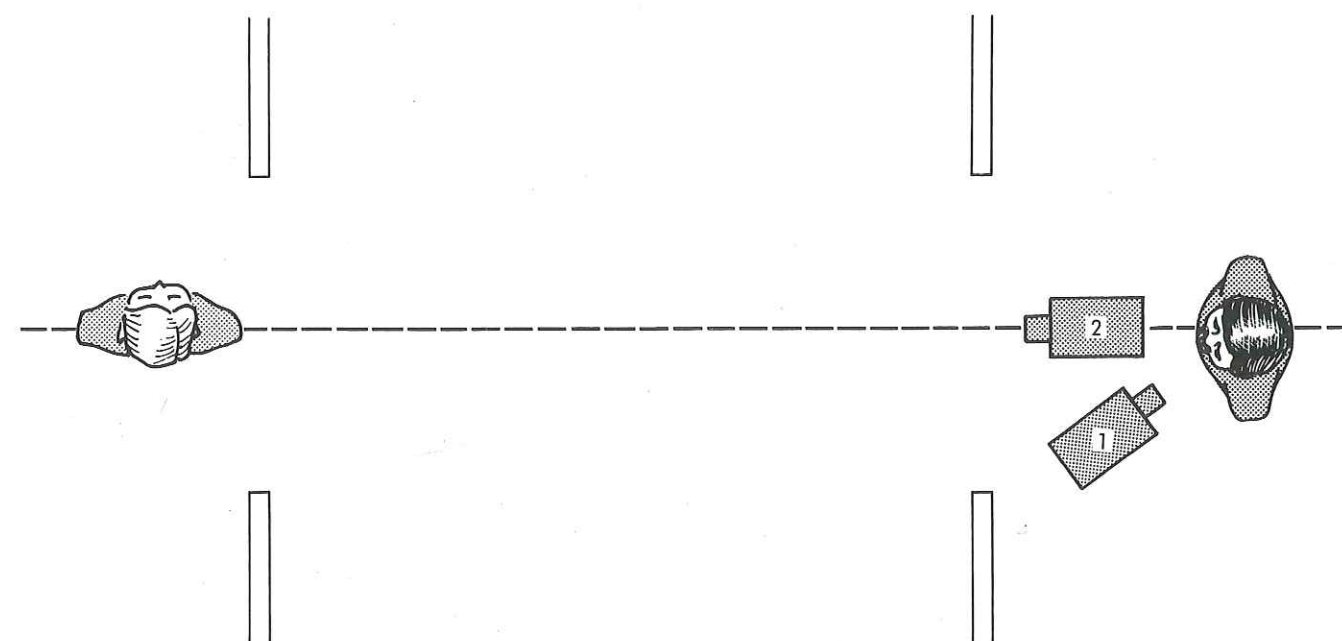


6.96



6.97

6.96–6.97 POV cutting in *Rear Window*. Jeff looks out his window (6.96). The next shot shows what he sees from his optical POV (6.97).



6.98 POV and the axis of action. An overhead diagram of POV cutting in *Rear Window*. The second camera setup doesn't cross the axis of action.



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For more examples of point-of-view editing and an analysis of a scene, see “Three nights of a dreamer.”

Hitchcock is so interested in exploiting subjective cutting that he varies the POV shots as *Rear Window* goes on. Eager to solve the mystery, Jeff begins to use binoculars and a photographic telephoto lens to magnify his view. By using shots taken with lenses of different focal lengths, Hitchcock shows how each new optical tool enlarges what Jeff can see (6.99–6.102). As the suspense grows, we get to see more clues to a possible murder.



6.99



6.100



6.101



6.102

6.99–6.102 Magnifying POV. When Jeff looks through his binoculars (6.99), we see a telephoto POV shot of his neighbor (6.100). When he employs a powerful photographic lens (6.101), the POV shot enlarges his neighbor's activities even more (6.102).



Hitchcock's gradual enlargement of POV framings in *Rear Window* shows that a filmmaker can tweak standardized editing patterns in fresh ways. But in other respects the *Rear Window* scenes, like the gas-pump explosion in *The Birds*, are traditional. For instance, both films present a POV pattern consisting of three shots. We see a shot of the person looking, a shot of what's looked at (seen from a subjective angle), and a return to a shot of the person looking. This ABA pattern anchors the subjective shot in an objective framework and tells us clearly that someone is seeing something.

But what if you delete the first shot in the trio, the shot of someone looking? You can create a small surprise by concealing the fact that someone is being watched. This was the choice made by Debra Granik in one scene in *Winter's Bone* (6.103–6.106). Note that even though we lack the usual first shot of Ree looking, the POV shot remains on the 180° line, and the following cut to her remains consistent with that.

For *Halloween*, John Carpenter selected a very unusual pattern of POV cutting, one that has strong implications for narration in this slasher horror film (6.107–6.110). He created an uncertainty: Does Laurie actually see Michael Myers



6.103



6.104



6.105



6.106

6.103–6.106 Retroactive POV. One scene in *Winter's Bone* ends with a telephoto shot of Ree walking her sister and brother to school (6.103). Cut to the sister in class, apparently seen from an objective standpoint (6.104). But soon she lifts her eyes to stare straight at the camera (6.105). Another cut reveals that we've been seeing the girl through Ree's eyes (6.106).



6.107



6.108



6.109



6.110

6.107–6.110 POV cutting for uncertainty. Laurie looks out her bedroom window (6.107). Cut to a shot, approximating her viewpoint, of Michael Myers in his mask (6.108). This seems a conventional POV shot, and the return to Laurie (6.109) suggests the standard ABA cutting pattern. But the next shot of the laundry line shows that Michael is now gone (6.110). It's very unusual to conceal such a drastic change in the POV area during a shot of the person looking. Did Laurie imagine that Michael was there? Or does he have the power to vanish? But if he can disappear, why doesn't she seem surprised?

in the yard? Or is he a figment of her imagination? Or does the character have the supernatural power to disappear? The uncertainty plays into the film's larger mystery about whether the indestructible Michael is indeed "the boogymen." POV cutting is a fairly standardized technique, but it still offers many creative choices to the director inclined to experiment.

“At its core, it's really about an investigation. . . . The first part of the movie is introducing lead characters Blomkvist and Salander; they don't meet immediately. The first part is cross-cutting their individual stories.”

—Angus Wall and Kirk Baxter, editors of *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (2011)

Crosscutting

Within a particular scene, continuity editing allows the filmmaker to expand or contract the viewer's knowledge. As long as you respect the 180° line, you can show us what your character is aware of, or you can cut to things that she or he doesn't notice (say, a doorknob turning mysteriously). But the continuity system allows you to make your narration wide ranging. Editing can create omniscience, that godlike awareness of things happening in many places. The most common editing strategy here is **crosscutting**.

With crosscutting, the plot alternates shots of story events in one place with shots of another event elsewhere. The technique was first developed by D. W. Griffith in his last-minute rescues. In *The Battle at Elderbush Gulch*, a cavalry troop is riding to save some settlers trapped in a cabin and battling the Indians outside (6.111–6.114). Griffith alternates shots of the settlers, the Indians getting closer to the cabin, and the troop hurrying to arrive in time.

Crosscutting introduces some spatial discontinuity by shuttling us from place to place; but by giving us unrestricted knowledge of a situation, it can clarify conflict and build tension. In *Jerry Maguire*, crosscutting shows sports agent Jerry and



6.111



6.113

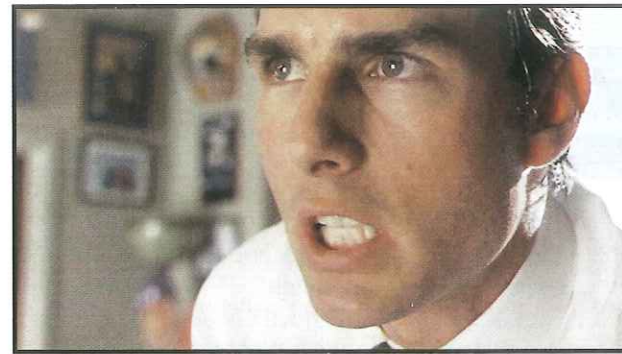


6.112



6.114

6.111–6.114 Crosscutting for a last-minute rescue. In *The Battle of Elderbush Gulch*, Griffith cuts from a shot of the cavalry (6.111) to a view inside the besieged cabin (6.112). He cuts back to the cavalry (6.113) and then back to the cabin (6.114). The technique gives us an unrestricted range of knowledge and summons up suspense: Will the rescuers arrive in time?



6.115



6.117



6.116



6.118

6.115–6.118 Crosscutting for tension. Jerry is in a race to secure his clients' loyalty before his arrogant rival gets to them. A shot of Jerry seething (6.115) is followed by a cut to the rival and his assistant (6.116). As Jerry tries to reach his clients on the phone (6.117) we cut to his rival doing the same (6.118).

his rival racing to phone the same clients (6.115–6.118). Without the crosscutting, we wouldn't know how the rival uses unscrupulous means to make Jerry fail. Fritz Lang's *M* is entirely built upon crosscutting. Police search for a child murderer, gangsters prowl the streets looking for him, and we occasionally see the murderer himself. The alternation builds up suspense while giving us a wider range of knowledge than any character has. We know that the gangsters are after the killer, but the police don't.

In the typical crosscut sequence, the two or more lines of action are taking place at the same time. But because of its power, the technique has been extended to situations in which the action isn't simultaneous. Sometimes filmmakers will crosscut one line of action in the present with another in the past. Griffith pioneered this idea in *Intolerance*. Here present-time story action is crosscut with stories taking place at other historical periods. He aimed to draw parallels between intolerance in different eras, but he also created suspense at the film's end by crosscutting four separate climaxes.

The technique remains part of the filmmaker's toolkit. Christopher Nolan employs Griffith-style crosscutting to build suspense in the climactic bomb sequence of *The Dark Knight* and the multilayered dreams of *Inception*, which somewhat resembles *Intolerance*. Nolan crosscuts past and present story lines in *Memento* and *The Prestige*.

We have learned the continuity style so well that we aren't usually aware of how it shapes our responses. Filmmakers know how familiar we are with it, and they can alter it, as long as the variations don't violate its basic principles. (See "A Closer Look.")

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We analyze *Inception*'s use of crosscutting in "Inception revisited" and in our e-book, *Christopher Nolan: A Labyrinth of Linkages*.



A CLOSER LOOK

Intensified Continuity: *Unstoppable*, *L. A. Confidential*, and Contemporary Editing

By the 1930s, most of the world's commercial filmmakers had embraced the continuity editing system. But it underwent changes over the years. Today's editing practices abide by the principles of continuity but amplify them in certain ways. We can call this newer style *intensified continuity*.

A straightforward example comes from *Unstoppable* (6.119–6.122). This scene obeys the 180° system, but some of director Tony Scott's choices wouldn't have been made by Huston in *The Maltese Falcon* or Hitchcock in *Rear Window*. For one thing, the cutting is very fast. The conversation, which takes 28 seconds, is shown in 15 shots, an average of less than 2 seconds per shot. At one point, a single line of dialogue is broken into 3 shots.

Between 1930 and 1960, a film typically consisted of 300–800 shots. Things changed from the sixties onward, and today a 2-hour film might contain 3,000 shots or more. (*Unstoppable* has over 3,200.) Hitchcock could cut action scenes quickly, as we saw in *The Birds*' gull attack, but his dialogue scenes were more slowly paced. By contrast, intensified continuity cuts conversations quickly as well. "You always hear things like, 'We

need to put more energy into this scene,'" says Tim Streeto, editor of *Greenberg*. "That can translate into quick editing, where you go back and forth between two characters like a ping-pong match."

Partly because filmmakers have chosen faster editing, they tend to build their scenes out of fairly close views of individual characters, rather than fuller, longer-held shots. As we've seen, the viewer can absorb close views more quickly than long shots. As filmmakers have concentrated more on faces, they have opted for fewer establishing shots, and those may come late in the scene's action rather than near the start.

“Now nobody trusts the actor's performance. If an actor has a scene where they are sitting in the distance, everybody says, 'What are you shooting? It has to be close-up! This is ridiculous. You have the position of the hand, the whole body—this is the feeling of a movie. I hate movies where everybody has big close-ups all the time. . . . This is television. I have talking heads on my television set in my home all the time.'”

—Miroslav Ondříček, cinematographer



6.119



6.120



6.121



6.122

6.119–6.122 The persistence of classical continuity editing. In *Unstoppable*, two rail yard workers come to Connie, their supervisor, and report that an unmanned train is running free. The scene is treated through conventional continuity, with an establishing shot (6.119), reverse angles (6.120), eyeline matches (6.121), and over-the-shoulder framings (6.122). The axis of action is respected throughout, as is the balancing between decentered reverse shot (see 6.19–6.20).

Moreover, many of the close shots are taken with telephoto lenses. Nearly all the shots in the *Unstoppable* scene are captured by long focal-length lenses, which can create fairly tight framings (6.120, 6.121). Because modern screen formats are wide, we may find two or more facial close-ups filling the screen. We also find more frame mobility. The *Unstoppable* scene includes many reframings, a tracking shot, and no fewer than five quick zooms.

These creative decisions create a faster, more concentrated version of classic continuity. We can analyze this style in a bit more detail by examining a scene from *L. A. Confidential*.

After arresting three black suspects, Lieutenant Ed Exley prepares to bully a confession from them. The scene takes less than a minute but employs nine shots, two with significant camera movement. Director Curtis Hanson shifts the emphasis among several key characters by coordinating his editing with anamorphic widescreen compositions, staging in depth, tight framings, rack-focus, and camera movement (6.123–6.134). Interestingly, the actors make little expressive use of their hands or bodies; the performances are almost completely facial.

The persistence of the continuity system may seem surprising, since modern films may feel rougher-textured than classic studio products. Mismatches on actions or eyelines are a bit more common now, but they're often used as an accent within a series of correctly matched cuts. A chase or a fight can be spiced up by a shift in screen direction or a jerkily matched movement. As Chris Lebenzon, an editor on *Unstoppable*, puts it: "In the action world, sometimes what used to be called a 'bad cut' is actually kind of a good one because it jars you in



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After you've read about *L. A. Confidential*, you might visit our blog entries on the *Bourne* trilogy: "Unsteadicam chronicles," "[insert your favorite Bourne pun here]," and "I broke everything new again." The entry titled "Intensified continuity revisited" compares a scene in *The Shop Around the Corner* with the same one in the remake, *You've Got Mail*. For thoughts on multiple-camera shooting and continuity, see "Cutting remarks: On *The Good German*, classical style, and the Police Tactical Unit."

a way that's more appropriate to the scene."

Why did this intensified form of continuity become so common? It was encouraged by many factors, including computer-based editing, but television was a major influence. Since the 1950s, many television directors favored close-ups, fast cutting, and considerable camera movement. On small screens, closer views look better than long shots, which tend to lose detail. Rapid cutting and camera movement constantly refresh the image and could keep the viewer from switching channels. In the 1960s and 1970s, filmmakers realized that the movies they were making for theaters would find their ultimate audience on the home screen. Accordingly, many directors "shot for the box." Later generations of directors, such as Ridley Scott and David Fincher, began their careers in commercials and music videos, so they were already adept in the quick pace of modern television. Today intensified continuity is well suited to being watched on laptop computers, tablets, and smartphones.



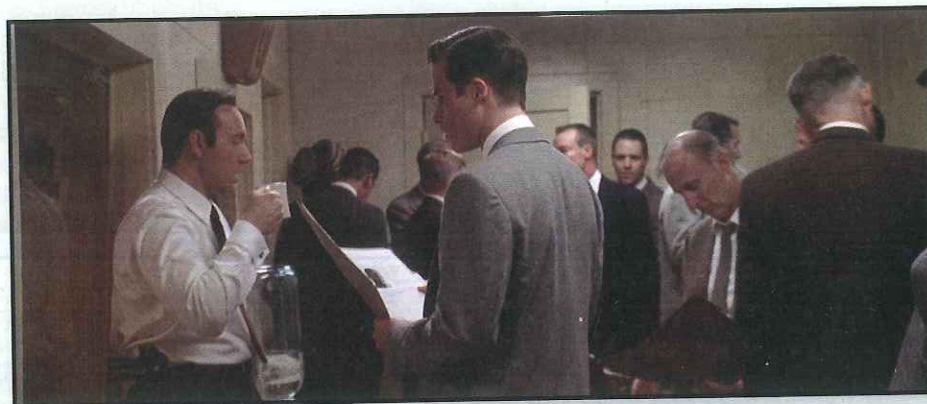
6.123 Shot 1: The scene begins by presenting only a portion of the space, a suspect in the interrogation room. A reflection shows Exley waiting and his colleagues milling about outside the room. This image singles out the core dramatic action to come—Exley's brutal confrontation with the suspects.



A CLOSER LOOK

Continued

6.124 Shot 2: A match on Exley's action of turning gives us a fuller view of the policemen and establishes two other main characters: Jack Vincennes on the far left and Bud White in the background, frontally placed and watching. This is only a partial establishing shot; a later camera movement will specify the layout of the interrogation rooms.



6.125 Shot 3: Hanson underscores White's presence by cutting to a telephoto shot of him saying that the suspects killed his partner.



6.126 Shot 4: In an echo of the opening framing, Exley now stands at the second interrogation room, seen in another reflection. The shot also reiterates Vincennes's presence. He'll provide an important reaction later.



6.127 The camera tracks with Exley moving right to study the suspect in the third room. White's reflection can be seen in frame center. The camera movement has linked the three main detectives on the case while also establishing the three rooms as being side by side. At the end of the camera movement, Exley turns, and . . .



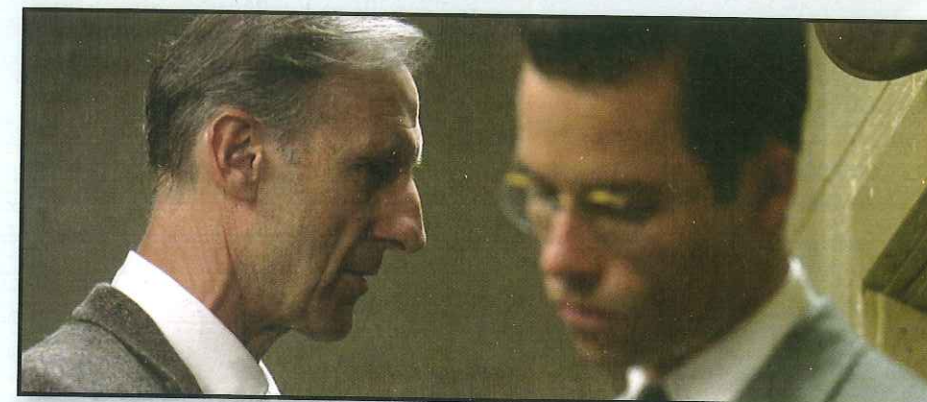
6.128 Shot 5: . . . a cut to two-shot establishes his superior, Smith, on the scene. As Smith explains that the suspects' shotguns put them at the murder site, the camera racks focus to him, putting Exley out of focus.



6.129 Shot 6: A cutaway to White listening—again, a tight facial shot taken with a telephoto lens—reminds us of his presence. He is only an observer in this phase of the scene, but as the questioning heats up, he will burst in to attack a suspect.



6.130 Shot 7: Returning to the two-shot shows Smith demanding that Exley make the men confess.



6.131 Shot 8: A reverse angle on Exley, the first shot in the scene devoted to his face alone, underscores his determination: "Oh, I'll break them, sir."





A CLOSER LOOK

Continued



6.132 Shot 9a: A cut back to the two-shot supplies Smith's satisfied reaction.



6.133 Shot 9 continues: Exley turns away. The lens shifts focus to catch his grim face in the foreground, preparing us for the brutality he will display.



6.134 Shot 9 continues as Exley walks out of frame, revealing with a rack-focus Vincennes's skeptical expression. The telephoto lens, supported by the rack-focus, has supplied facial views of Smith, then Exley, and then Vincennes all in a single shot.

Temporal Continuity: Order, Frequency, and Duration

As we've seen in Chapter 3, in narrative form, the plot's presentation of the story action usually involves manipulating time. Continuity editing offers the filmmaker many choices about presenting story time. Those options involve the dimensions we've already charted: order, frequency, and duration.

Order and Frequency Continuity editing typically presents the story events in a 1-2-3 order. Spade rolls a cigarette in one shot, Effie enters in another shot, and so on. The most common violation of 1-2-3 order is a flashback, signaled by a cut or dissolve. As for frequency, classical continuity editing also often presents only *once* what happens *once* in the story. Within this tradition, it would be a gross mistake for Huston to repeat the shot of, say, Brigid sitting down (6.60). So chronological sequence and one-for-one frequency are the standard methods of handling order and frequency within the continuity style of editing. There are occasional exceptions, as we saw in our examples from *Hiroshima mon amour*, *The Godfather*, and *Police Story* (pp. 228–230).

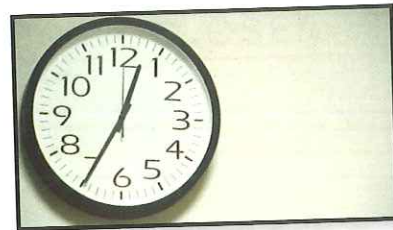
Duration: Continuous or Elided Duration offers more unusual editing possibilities. In the classical continuity system, story duration is seldom expanded by editing. Admittedly, overlapping cutting (p. 229) sometimes stretches out an action. But usually duration is presented continuously (plot time and screen time equaling story time) or is elided (story time being greater than plot time and screen time). Dialogue scenes are the most common examples; they're typically played out in their story duration.

Let's first consider *temporal continuity*, the most common possibility. Here a scene occupying, say, five minutes in the story also occupies five minutes when projected on the screen. We can pick out three ways to achieve temporal continuity, all of them present in the first scene of *The Maltese Falcon*.

First, the narrative progression of the scene has no gaps. Every movement by the characters and every line of dialogue are presented. Second, there's the sound track. Sound issuing from the story space (what is called *diegetic* sound) is a standard indicator of temporal continuity, especially when, as in this scene, the sound bleeds over each cut. Third, there's the match on action between shots 5 and 6. So powerful is the match on action that it creates both spatial *and* temporal continuity. The reason is obvious: If an action carries across the cut, we assume that the space and time are continuous from shot to shot. Continuous story action, diegetic sound overlapping the cuts, and matching on action are three primary indicators that the duration of the scene is continuous.

The filmmaker may not want complete continuity of duration. Just as a novelist sometimes condenses a scene to its high points, a filmmaker may want to skip over some less important moments. That will demand editing that creates temporal *ellipsis*. An ellipsis is something that has been omitted, and thanks to cutting a filmmaker may skip over seconds, minutes, hours, days, years, or centuries. Let's say you want to show a character getting ready for work in the morning. If you're making a classically constructed film, you might reduce this process to a few shots of the character going into the shower, putting on shoes, and frying an egg. As we saw on p. 229, the classical approach to editing may use empty frames, cutaways, or optical devices like dissolves to cover short temporal ellipses.

Elliding time offers a good example of how cinematic conventions have changed. In films made before the 1960s, dissolves, fades, or wipes were typically used to indicate an ellipsis between shots, usually the end of one scene and the beginning of the next. The Hollywood rule was that a dissolve indicates a brief time lapse and a fade indicates a much longer one.



6.135



6.136



6.137

6.135–6.137 Elliptical cuts in *Wendy and Lucy*. Arrested for shoplifting, Wendy is worried about having left her dog Lucy at the supermarket. As she's fingerprinted, Wendy glances up, and an eyeline match shows the clock (6.135). A cut to the next shot shows Wendy in a cell, indicating that some minutes have elapsed (6.136). The clock shot functioned as a cutaway to cover a time gap. In the cell, another cut shows Wendy in a different position (6.137). This suggests that still more time has passed. An older film would have implied the passage of time through dissolves, but here the abrupt changes of locale and character position suggest the same thing. A later shot of the clock will show that Wendy has been held for at least two hours.

Contemporary filmmakers usually employ a cut for such transitions. For example, in *2001*, Stanley Kubrick cuts directly from a bone spinning in the air to a space station orbiting the earth, one of the boldest graphic matches in narrative cinema. The cut eliminates millions of years of story time. Less drastically, most contemporary films indicate the passage of time simply by direct cuts. Changes in lighting, locale, or character position cue us that story time has passed (6.135–6.137).

The dissolve and fade have made a comeback in the age of digital video. For one thing, editing programs provide them, along with many varieties of wipes, so these optical effects are easy to incorporate. In addition, many online documentaries employ dissolves in the older manner, to indicate a passage of time. When the maker of a YouTube video wants to skip over the boring stretches of a cat fighting with a paper bag, a gentle dissolve may do the trick.

Montage Sequences One form of ellipsis has persisted from the 1920s to the present. Sometimes the filmmaker wants to show a large-scale process or a lengthy period—a city waking up in the morning, a war, a child growing up. Here the filmmaker can pick another device from the menu: the **montage sequence**. (This should not be confused with the concept of *montage* in Sergei Eisenstein's film theory.) Brief portions of a process, informative titles (for example, "1865" or "San Francisco"), stereotyped images (such as the Eiffel Tower), newsreel footage, newspaper headlines, and the like can be joined by dissolves and music to create a quick, regular rhythm and to compress a lengthy series of actions into a few moments.

American studio films of the 1930s established some montage clichés—calendar pages fluttering away, newspaper presses pounding out an Extra—but in the hands of deft editors, such sequences became small virtuoso pieces. The driving pace of gangster films like *Scarface* and *The Roaring Twenties* owes a lot to dynamic montage sequences. Slavko Vorkapich, an experimental filmmaker, created somewhat abstract, almost delirious summaries of wide-ranging actions such as stock market crashes, political campaigns, and an opera singer's career (6.138).

Montage sequences have been a mainstay of narrative filmmaking ever since. *Jaws* employs a montage to summarize the start of tourist season through brief shots of vacationers arriving at the beach. A montage sequence in *Spider-Man* shows Peter Parker sketching his superhero costume, inspired by visions of the girl he loves (6.139, 6.140). All these instances remind us that because montage sequences usually lack dialogue, they tend to come wrapped in music. In *Tootsie*, a song accompanies a series of magazine covers showing the hero's rise to success as a TV star.

As with space, the filmmaker who employs the continuity style uses cinematic time primarily to advance the narrative. Like graphics, rhythm, and space, time is organized to unfold cause and effect and arouse curiosity, suspense, and surprise. In turn, we viewers who know the conventions pick up the cues and engage with the ways in which time is presented. We expect the editing to present story events in chronological order, with perhaps occasional rearrangement through flashbacks. We expect that editing will usually respect the frequency of story events. If an action is shown two or three times, it's exceptionally important. And we assume that the actions that don't matter to story causality will be dropped or trimmed by judicious ellipses. All these expectations allow the viewer to follow the story with minimal effort.

But there are many alternatives to the continuity approach, and these are worth a look.

Alternatives to Continuity Editing

Powerful and widespread as it is, the continuity tradition remains only one approach to editing. As you'd expect, some filmmakers have explored other possibilities.



6.138



6.139



6.140

6.138–6.140 Montage sequences old and new. *Maytime* uses superimpositions (here, the singer, sheet music, and a curtain rising) and rapid editing to summarize an opera singer's triumphs (6.138). *Citizen Kane* ironically refers to this passage in the montage sequences showing Susan Alexander's failures. For a montage sequence in *Spider-Man*, CGI technique creates a split image, showing both Peter's expression and a close-up of the costume he's designing (6.139). The *Spider-Man* sequence also uses a more traditional linking device, a dissolve that briefly superimposes two shots (6.140).

Graphic and Rhythmic Possibilities

Films using abstract or associational form have emphasized the graphic and rhythmic dimensions of editing. Instead of joining shot 1 to shot 2 to present a story, you could join them on the basis of purely graphic or rhythmic qualities, independent of the time and space they represent. In films such as *Anticipation of the Night*, *Scenes from Under Childhood*, and *Western History*, experimentalist Stan Brakhage uses purely graphic means of joining shot to shot. Continuities and contrasts of light, texture, and shape motivate the editing. Similarly, parts of Bruce Conner's *Cosmic Ray*, *A Movie*, and *Report* cut together newsreel footage, old film clips, film leader, and black frames on the basis of graphic patterns of movement, direction, and speed.

Many nonnarrative films have emphasized editing rhythm over the images themselves. *Single-frame films* (in which each shot is only one frame long) are the most extreme examples of this concentration on rhythm. Two famous examples are Peter Kubelka's *Schwechater* and Robert Breer's *Fist Fight* (6.141). Other avant-garde experiments coordinate editing rhythm with abstract graphics, as we'll see with *Ballet mécanique* in Chapter 10.

The graphic and rhythmic possibilities of editing haven't been neglected in narrative film, either. In Busby Berkeley's elaborate dance numbers in *42nd Street*, *Gold Diggers of 1933*, *Footlight Parade*, *Gold Diggers of 1935*, and *Dames*, the story periodically grinds to a halt, and the film presents intricate choreography that highlights geometrical configurations of dancers and background (4.158, from



6.141 Single-frame filming. This strip of film shows the one-frame shots in Breer's *Fist Fight*. Onscreen, they create a pulsating flicker of barely discernible images.



6.142



6.143



6.144



6.145

6.142–6.145 Graphic matching in narrative cinema. In *An Autumn Afternoon*, Ozu cuts from one man drinking sake (6.142) to another in a very similar costume doing the same thing (6.143). In *Ohayo*, Ozu creates a playful graphic match by cutting from a clothesline with a bright red sweater in the upper left (6.144) to an interior with a red lampshade in the same position (6.145).

42nd Street). More complex is the graphic editing of Yasujiro Ozu. Ozu's cutting is often dictated by a much more precise graphic continuity than we find in the classical continuity style. He playfully creates close graphic matches on movement, position, and color (6.142–6.145).

Some silent filmmakers experimented with vigorous rhythmic cutting. In such films as Abel Gance's *La Roue*, Jean Epstein's *Coeur fidèle* and *La Glace à trois faces*, and Alexandre Volkoff's *Kean*, accelerated editing renders the tempo of an onrushing train, a whirling carousel, a racing automobile, and a drunken dance. We can find strong passages of rhythmic editing in sound cinema too, from 1930s films such as Rouben Mamoulian's *Love Me Tonight* and René Clair's *Le Million* to later films like *Assault on Precinct 13* and *The Terminator*. Pulsating rhythmic editing is prominent in films influenced by music videos, such as *Moulin Rouge*.

Spatial and Temporal Discontinuity

How might you tell a story without adhering to the continuity rules? One option is to use spatial continuity in ambiguous ways. In *Mon Oncle d'Amérique*, Alain Resnais interrupts the stories of his three main characters with shots of each character's favorite movie star, taken from French films of the 1940s. In some scenes, the cutting relies on continuity cues but uses them to create a discontinuity that arouses some uncertainty in the viewer (6.146–6.148).

More drastically, a filmmaker may violate or ignore the 180° system. The editing choices of filmmakers Jacques Tati and Yasujiro Ozu are based on what we might call 360° space. Instead of an axis of action that dictates that the camera be



6.146



6.147



6.148

6.146–6.148 Mixing continuity cues and discontinuity. At one point in *Mon Oncle d'Amérique*, René's pesky office mate calls to him (6.146). Resnais cuts to a shot of Jean Gabin (René's favorite star) in an older film, turning in reverse shot (6.147), as if he were replying to the man. Only then does Resnais supply a shot of René turning to meet his questioner (6.148). The film doesn't definitely present the Gabin shot as a fantasy image. We can't tell whether René imagines himself as his favorite star, or whether the film's narration draws the comparison apart from René's state of mind.

placed within an imaginary semicircle, these filmmakers work as if the action were not a line but a point at the center of a circle and as if the camera could be placed at any point on the circumference. In *Mr. Hulot's Holiday*, *Play Time*, and *Traffic*, Tati systematically films from almost every side; edited together, the shots present multiple spatial perspectives on a single event. Similarly, Ozu's scenes construct a 360° space that produces what the continuity style would consider grave editing errors. Ozu's films often do not yield consistent relative positions, eyeline matches, and screen directions (6.149, 6.150).

Are such cuts confusing? Defenders of the standard continuity system would say yes. But anyone who has seen films by Ozu or Tati can testify that their stories don't become unintelligible. These and other directors have found ways to keep the plot developments clear while also recalibrating our perception of space and time. Historically the continuity system offers one effective way to tell a story, but artistically, it isn't a necessity.

Apart from breaking or ignoring the 180° system, there are two other major tactics of discontinuity. One is the **jump cut**. This term is used in various ways but one primary meaning is this: When you cut together two shots of the same subject, if the shots differ only slightly in angle or composition, there will be a noticeable

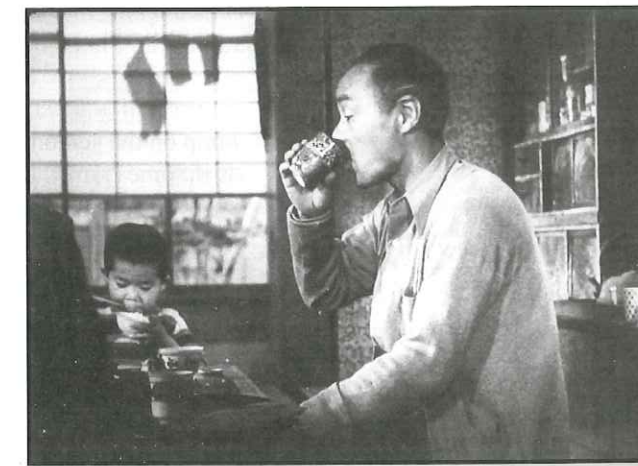


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If you have trouble spotting a jump cut, you could check our entry, "Sometimes a jump cut. . ." The martial-arts scenes discussed there use the technique for a very different purpose from the jump cuts in 6.151–6.155.



6.149



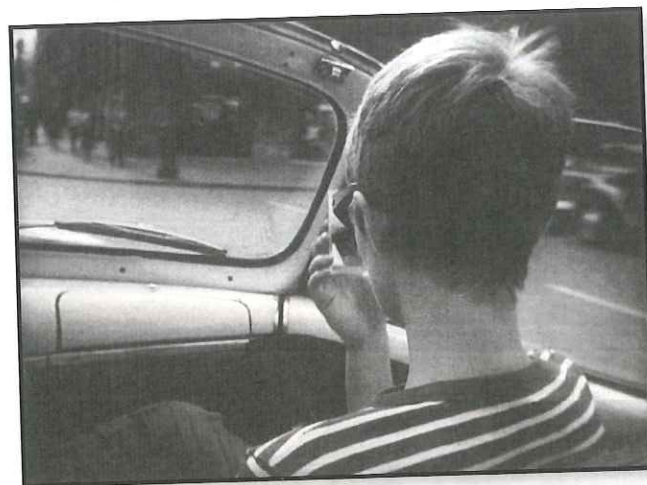
6.150

6.149–6.150 Ozu's 360° editing system. One of the gravest sins in the classical continuity style is to match on action while breaking the line, yet Ozu does this comfortably in *Early Summer*. He cuts on the grandfather's gesture of drinking (6.149) to a view from the opposite side (6.150).

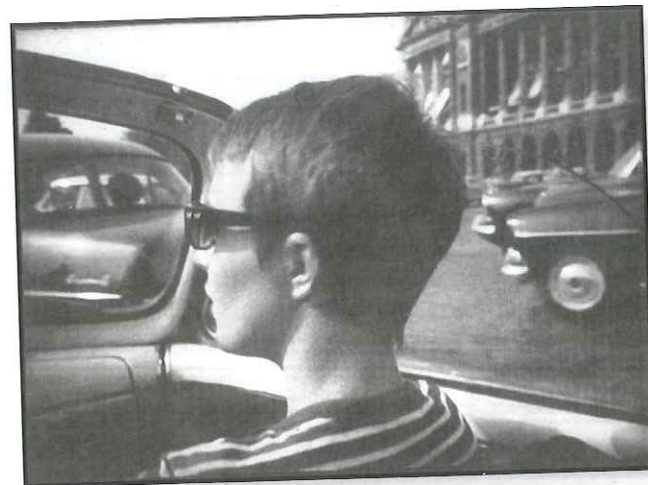


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Early Japanese swordplay movies display some daring rhythmic editing, as we demonstrate in "Bando on the run." We find something similar in Hong Kong action films. See "Bond vs. Chan: Jackie shows how it's done" and "Planet Hong Kong: The dragon dances."



6.151



6.152



6.153



6.154



6.155

6.151–6.155 Jump cuts then and now. Jean-Luc Godard's *Breathless* used jump cuts freely. A cut from this shot of Patricia (6.151) to the next one (6.152), creates a jarring effect, as if some frames had been dropped. Montage sequences may use jump cuts to suggest rapid change. In *The Wolf of Wall Street*, jump-cut long shots evoke an almost magical growth of the protagonist's stock brokerage (6.153–6.155). A more gradual process is suggested by the dissolves in the montage sequences in *Maytime* and *Spider-Man* (6.138–6.140).

jump on the screen. Instead of appearing as two shots of the subject, the result looks as if some frames have been cut out of a single shot (6.151, 6.152). Many filmmakers believe that jump cuts can be avoided by shifting the camera at least 30 degrees from shot to shot (the so-called 30° rule).

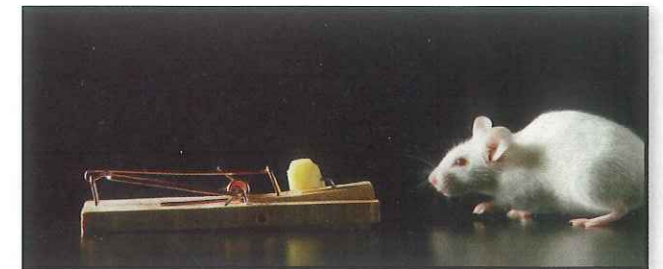
Even though jump cuts skip over some moments, they remain different from more common elliptical cuts. We saw an instance earlier, in the shots showing Wendy sitting in two positions on her cell bunk (6.136, 6.137). Those shots present two very different angles on the subject. A jump cut, however, shows the action from one angle or two very similar ones.

Jump cuts are quite noticeable and were long considered amateurish mistakes. But audiences eventually accepted them, although not in the doses that Godard supplied. Filmmakers now may use jump cuts in montage sequences and during moments of surprise, violence, or psychological disturbance (6.153–6.155).

A second sort of continuity disruption is created by the **nondiegetic insert**. Here the filmmaker cuts from the scene to a metaphorical or symbolic shot that



6.156



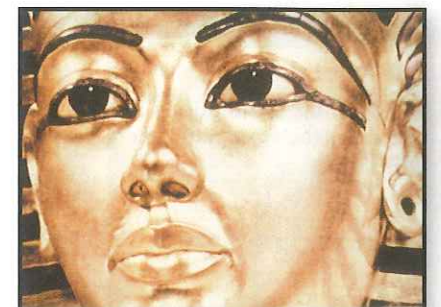
6.157



6.158



6.159



6.160

6.156–6.160 Nondiegetic editing. In *Lucy*, Luc Besson interrupts a scene of the title character being lured into danger (6.156) with an abstract shot of a mouse approaching a trap (6.157). A diegetic shot of Henri in *La Chinoise* (6.158) is followed by nondiegetic shots of the lion bed of King Tutankhamen (6.159) and his golden mask (6.160). Do the relics corroborate or challenge what Henri says?

doesn't belong to the space and time of the narrative (6.156, 6.157). In Sergei Eisenstein's *Strike*, the massacre of workers is intercut with the slaughter of a bull. In Godard's *La Chinoise*, Henri tells an anecdote about ancient Egyptians, who thought that "their language was the language of the gods." As he says this (6.158), Godard cuts in two close-ups of relics from the tomb of King Tutankhamen (6.159, 6.160). As nondiegetic inserts, coming from outside the story world, these prompt the spectator to search for implicit meanings and ask if the relics corroborate what Henri says.

There are still other alternatives to classical continuity, especially with respect to time. Although the classical approach to order and frequency of story events may seem the best option, it's only the most familiar. Story events don't have to be edited in 1-2-3 order.

Modern audiences have become accustomed to scenes that are interrupted by brief flashbacks. But some editing choices trigger greater uncertainty about exactly when something is taking place. Resnais's *La Guerre est finie* interrupts scenes cut in conventional continuity by images that may represent flashbacks, or fantasy episodes, or even future events. In Michael Haneke's *Caché* after a shot of a building, we see a boy looking out a window. This recalls the POV shots of Jeff looking at his neighbors in *Rear Window* (6.96, 6.97, 6.99–6.102). But in *Caché* the presumed chronological connection is revealed to be false (6.161, 6.162).

We've seen that editing can replay past scenes or Jackie Chan stunts (6.49–6.51). But filmmakers can repeat events to more disruptive effect. In *La Guerre est finie*, a future funeral is depicted in alternative ways, with the protagonist either present or absent. The escape sequence in Godard's *Pierrot le fou* not only scrambles the order of the shots but also plays with frequency by repeating one movement, Ferdinand jumping into the car (and showing it differently each time) (6.163–6.166). These editing choices block our normal expectations about story action and force us to concentrate on piecing together the film's narrative.



6.161



6.162

6.161–6.162 Ambiguous POV editing. *Caché* repeatedly shows a luxurious apartment building seen from across the street. After one nighttime view (6.161), there is a two-second shot of a bloodied boy watching (6.162). Later we'll learn that the editing has misled us severely.



6.163



6.164



6.165



6.166

6.163–6.166 Juggling temporal order and frequency. In *Pierrot le fou*, Ferdinand jumps into the car as Marianne pulls away (6.163), but the next shot flashes back to them fleeing their apartment (6.164). After they seem to have escaped (6.165), earlier phases of the action are repeated, including Ferdinand's jump into the car (6.166).

The editing may take liberties with story duration as well. Although complete continuity and ellipsis are the most common ways of rendering duration, expansion—stretching a moment out, making screen time greater than story time—remains a distinct possibility. François Truffaut uses such expansions in *Jules and Jim* to underscore narrative turning points, as when the heroine Catherine lifts her veil or jumps off an embankment into a river.

Filmmakers have reworked some of the most basic tenets of the continuity system. We've indicated, for example, that a match on action strongly suggests that time continues across the cut. Yet Alain Resnais creates an impossible continuity



6.167



6.168

6.167–6.168 The impossible match on action. In *Last Year at Marienbad*, small groups of guests are standing around the hotel lobby. A medium shot frames a blonde woman beginning to turn away from the camera (6.167). In the middle of her turn, there is a cut to her, still turning but in a different setting (6.168).

of motion in *Last Year at Marienbad* (6.167, 6.168). The smooth match on action, along with the woman's graphically matched position in the frame, implies that her head turns continuously, yet the change of setting contradicts this impression. As we'll see in Chapter 10, experimental films push ambiguous or contradictory editing even further.

Over time, audiences can become accustomed to discontinuities in narrative contexts. But with the jump cut, the nondiegetic insert, and the inconsistent match on action, temporal dislocations can push away from traditional notions of storytelling and create ambiguous relations among shots. These ambiguities needn't confuse us: they can stir our imaginations. Sergei Eisenstein's classic *October* provides many good examples.

CREATIVE DECISIONS

Discontinuity Editing in *October*

For many Soviet filmmakers of the 1920s, editing didn't simply serve the narrative progression, as in the continuity system that Kuleshov so much admired. Editing could be a tool for organizing the entire form of the film. Eisenstein's *Strike*, *Potemkin*, *October*, and *Old and New* were all built on the basis of certain editing devices—sometimes recruited to advance a plot, but at other times serving to comment on the action and suggest implicit meanings.

Eisenstein understood the continuity system quite well, but he sought to go beyond it. He believed that all sorts of clashes from shot to shot would prod the spectator to engage more actively with the film. Discontinuities of space and time could stir the spectator's senses by creating a sharp impact. They could arouse feelings, as viewers began to see the emotional connections among shots. And certain kinds of discontinuities could spur the spectator to reflect on the themes that Eisenstein sought to communicate.

No longer bound by conventional dramaturgy, Eisenstein's films roam freely through time and space. Crosscutting, eyeline cuts, and other devices of the continuity system are pushed in new directions, plunging us into a realm that could only exist on film. A short passage from *October* can illustrate how he uses editing discontinuities.

The sequence is the third one in the film (and comprises over 125 shots!). The story action is simple. The Provisional Government has taken power in Russia after the February Revolution, but instead of withdrawing from World War I, the government has kept its troops on the front. This maneuver has left the Russian people no better off than under the czar they deposed. In classical Hollywood cinema, this story might have been shown through a montage sequence of newspaper



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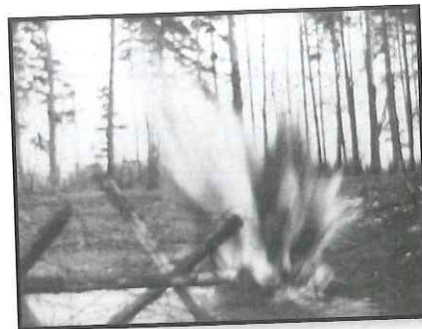
We visit some striking editing decisions in "Some cuts I have known and loved."



6.169



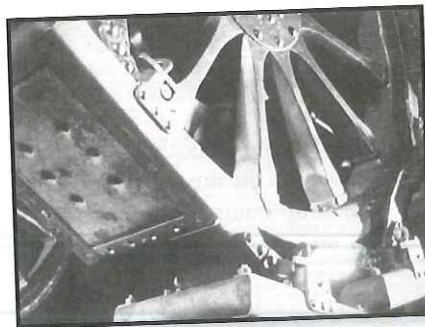
6.170



6.171



6.172



6.173



6.174



6.175

6.169–6.175 War, government, and the home front in *October*. The sequence begins with shots showing the Russian soldiers on the front casting down their rifles and joining the German soldiers. Soon the former enemies are drinking and laughing together (6.169). Eisenstein then cuts back to the Provisional Government, where a flunky extends a document to an unseen ruler (6.170); this pledges the government to continue the war. The soldiers' fraternization is suddenly disrupted by a bombardment (6.171). The soldiers run back to the trenches and huddle as dirt and bomb fragments rain down on them. Eisenstein then cuts to a cannon being lowered off an assembly line by factory workers (6.172). For a time, the narration crosscuts the descending cannon (6.173) with the soldiers (6.174). In the last section of the sequence, the shots of the cannon are crosscut with hungry women and children standing in breadlines in the snow (6.175). The sequence ends with two intertitles: "All as before . . ." / "Hunger and war."

headlines smoothly linked to a scene showing a protagonist complaining that the Provisional Government has not solved people's problems. *October's* protagonist, though, is not one person but the entire Russian people, and the film does not typically use dialogue scenes to present its story points. Rather, *October* seeks to go beyond a straightforward presentation of story events by making the viewer actively connect those events and reflect on their implications. So the film confronts us with a disorienting and disjunctive set of images (6.169–6.175).

Not only does *October* lack an individual protagonist; this sequence exploits spatial and temporal discontinuities. Although at times the 180° rule is respected (especially in the shots of women and children), never does Eisenstein introduce his situations with establishing shots. The major components of the locales are seldom shown together in one shot. On the whole, constructive editing builds up each line of action. (No surprise: Eisenstein studied under Kuleshov.)

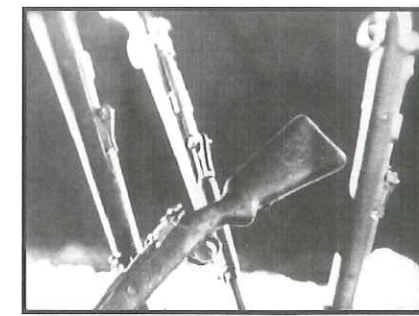
The broader organizing principle of the sequence is crosscutting. Eisenstein alternates images of battlefield and government, factory and street. In the continuity system, crosscutting usually indicates that different actions are taking place simultaneously. But *October's* crosscutting doesn't specify when the events are occurring. The women and children are seen at night, but it's daylight on the military front. Do the battlefield events take place before or after or during the women's vigil? We can't say. Eisenstein's crosscutting is primarily emotional



6.176



6.177



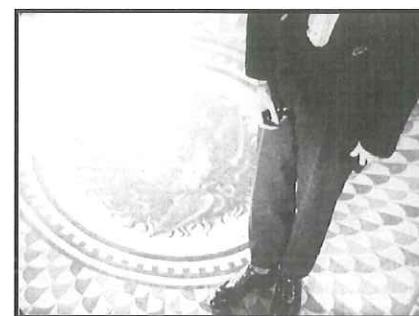
6.178



6.179



6.180



6.181

6.176–6.181 The government breaks the peace. Eisenstein cuts from a laughing German soldier facing right (6.176) to a menacing eagle statue, facing left, at the government headquarters (6.177). A static shot of rifles thrust into the snow (6.178) cuts to a long shot of a bursting shell (6.179). The impact is enhanced by a bold jump cut: The flunky is bowing (6.180), but suddenly he is standing up (6.181).

and conceptual. He's less concerned with presenting a linear story than arousing indignation at government policy and sympathy for its victims.

For example, to dramatize how the government prevents men meeting peaceably, Eisenstein shatters the friendship of the soldiers with disruptive cuts (6.176–6.181). The soldiers fraternize in fairly continuous duration, but the Provisional Government's behavior is given in drastic ellipses. This permits Eisenstein to identify the government as the unseen cause of the bombardment that ruptures the peace. This implication is reinforced by the way the first explosions are followed by the jump cut of the government flunky (6.180–6.181). Ellipsis takes on another role when the editing dramatizes the suffering of the women and children waiting in line. Instead of a gradual wasting away, we get abrupt decline: First we see them standing, then later lying pitifully on the ground.

Thinking like a filmmaker: How would you dramatize the idea that the government oppresses its people? Eisenstein does it daringly, by creating a visual metaphor. Once the government orders the bombardment of the front, the soldiers are huddling under the barrage. This already suggests that the government, not the German army, is the real enemy. Eisenstein takes things further by showing men crushed by the war machine. Thanks to editing, shots of the cannon slowly descending are contrasted with shots of the men crouching in the trenches (6.173, 6.174). The graphic clash of directions is reinforced by a false eyeline match. The soldier looks upward, as if he could see the lowering cannon, even though he and the cannon are in entirely separate places. By showing the factory workers lowering the cannon (6.172), the cutting links the captive soldiers to the proletariat. Finally, as the cannon hits the ground, Eisenstein crosscuts images of it with the shots of the starving families of the soldiers and the workers. They, too, are oppressed, literally pressed down, by the government machine. As the cannon wheels hit the floor ponderously, Eisenstein cuts to the women's feet in the snow. The machine's

heaviness is linked by titles ("one pound," "half a pound") to the steady starvation of the women and children. Eisenstein's editing discontinuities encourage us to build up a political commentary on the story events.

Graphic discontinuities recur throughout *October*, especially in scenes of dynamic action, and they hit our eyes more forcefully than neatly matched shots would. To watch an Eisenstein film is to submit oneself to percussive graphic editing. But that editing also gives us powerful images—friendly soldiers, faceless bureaucrats, suffering women and children—that stir our emotions. By refusing to focus on one protagonist, Eisenstein moves masses of people to the fore.

But he did not want to stop with mere sympathy. *October* tries to show the underlying causes of the masses' suffering more directly than the traditional dramatic conflict between individualized heroes and villains could. Eisenstein's editing constructs correspondences, analogies, and contrasts that ask us to *interpret* the story events. The interpretation is not simply handed to the viewer; rather, the editing discontinuities push us to work out implicit meanings. By assembling the shots in our minds, we grasp his idea that the new government is no different from the old one and that ordinary people are sacrificed to a war machine.

No one was more aware of the multitude of creative decisions involved in editing than Eisenstein. He saw that classical continuity would not achieve his purposes. So he chose to make a film in which discontinuities of graphic elements, time, and space could prod the spectator into sympathy and thought. In the process he demonstrated that there are powerful alternatives to the principles of continuity editing.

SUMMARY

When any two shots are joined, we can ask several questions:

1. How are the shots graphically continuous or discontinuous?
2. What rhythmic relations are created?
3. Are the shots spatially continuous? If not, what creates the discontinuity? (Crosscutting? Ambiguous cues?) If the shots are spatially continuous, how does the 180° system create the continuity?
4. Are the shots temporally continuous? If so, what creates the continuity? (For example, matches on action?) If not, what creates the discontinuity? (Ellipsis? Overlapping cuts?)

More generally, we can ask the question we ask of every film technique: How does this technique *function* with respect to the film's narrative form? Does the film use editing to lay out the narrative space, time, and cause-effect chain in the manner of classical continuity? How do editing patterns emphasize facial expressions, dialogue, or setting? Do editing patterns withhold narrative information? In general, how does editing contribute to the viewer's experience of the film?

Some practical hints: You can learn to notice editing in several ways. If you are having trouble noticing cuts try watching a film or video and tapping each time a shot changes. Once you recognize editing easily, watch any film with the sole purpose of observing one editing aspect—say, the way space is presented, or the control of graphics or time. Sensitize yourself to rhythmic editing by noting cutting rates; tapping out the tempo of the cuts can help.

Watching 1930s and 1940s American films can introduce you to classical continuity style; try to predict what shot will come next in a sequence. (You'll be surprised at how often you're right.) When you watch a film on video, try turning off the sound; editing patterns become more apparent this way. When there's a violation of continuity, ask yourself whether it is accidental or serves a purpose. When you see a film that does not obey classical continuity principles, search for its unique editing patterns. Use the slow-motion, freeze, and reverse controls on a video player to analyze a film sequence as this chapter has done. (Almost any film will do.) In such ways as these, you can considerably increase your understanding of the power of editing.

CHAPTER

Sound in the Cinema

You're planning a scene that shows Jim phoning Amanda. As usual, you confront a choice.

You can show both sides of the conversation, cutting between Jim and Amanda as they exchange lines. (Many phone scenes are staged and filmed as if they were shot/reverse shot conversations.) Or you could stage it in split-screen, which would keep both Jim and Amanda visible for the whole dialogue. Either option yields unrestricted narration, which is ideal if you want to reveal both characters' behavior in the conversation.

Alternatively, you could keep the camera on one character, say Jim, for the entire scene. Instead of showing Amanda, you would simply let us hear her responses. Showing only Jim would restrict us to his range of knowledge, and that choice can add uncertainty and suspense. If we hear Amanda agree to the date, but we don't see her doing so, we might entertain some doubts about her interest or her motives. And is she alone or with someone? As often happens, restricted narration might yield some curiosity and suspense.

But there's another option still. Suppose we don't see *or* hear Amanda. We hear only Jim's side of the conversation, broken by pauses when he's listening to Amanda's replies. Our narration has grown still more restrictive: We know less than Jim knows. This option is often used for perfunctory actions, such as someone phoning to order a cab. Applied to a more significant scene, it could oblige us to listen more intently and imagine what's happening on the other end of the line (7.1).



7.1 The telephone teaser. One way to handle a phone conversation: In *Chungking Express*, a young man dumped by his girlfriend calls up other women he's known, eventually reaching those he hasn't seen since grade school. We hear only his clumsy efforts to remind them who he is. The comic effect comes partly from imagining the puzzlement and annoyance the women must be expressing.

Sound Decisions

We've seen at several points that film art offers both opportunities and constraints. As a filmmaker, you face a rich array of options. But you have to choose among them, and each choice has different implications. Moreover, some decisions create a cascade of further choices. If you show only Jim and keep Amanda offscreen, you still have to decide whether to let us hear her lines or not.

Filmmakers have to consider these options, either intellectually or intuitively, because each alternative affects the audience differently. Sound, like every other technique, offers a plenitude of possibilities, but the filmmaker judges which ones to pursue, based on how they suit the film's overall form and how they shape the viewer's experience.



7.2 Sound summons up an unseen space. Orson Welles had a radio career before going to Hollywood, so he understood the power of sound to arouse the audience's imagination. At the start of this scene from *The Magnificent Ambersons*, Georgie Minafer says good-bye to his Uncle Jack, who's about to board a train. But there's no establishing shot of the station, not even a sign identifying it. We see the two men against a pillar while we hear announcements echoing in a large, hollow space. The locomotive is evoked by a whistle, a chugging engine, and blasts of steam. Welles's sound design, aided by rear projection of a roof, has conjured up an entire locale.

As we saw in Chapter 1, in the process of film production, the sound track is constructed separately from the images, and it can be manipulated independently. This makes sound as flexible and wide-ranging as other techniques. Yet sound is perhaps the hardest one to study.

It's not because we're bad at listening. Even before we're born, we can distinguish voices. We differentiate male voices from female ones, and we recognize Mother's above all. Once we've grown, we exist in a continuous bath of sound. Just as our stereoscopic vision helps us locate details in the visual world, our ears can triangulate a sound's location—particularly if it's human speech, to which our auditory system is very sensitive. At our peak of health, we can note volume differences at a range of a trillion to one. We have, auditory scientists tell us, over 400,000 distinct sounds in our memory.

Yet unless we're musicians or sound engineers, we've learned to ignore most sounds in our environment. Our primary information about the color, texture, and layout of our surroundings comes from sight, and so in ordinary life, sound is often simply a background for our visual attention. Similarly, we speak of *watching* a film and of being movie *viewers* or *spectators*—all terms implying that the sound track is a secondary factor. We're strongly inclined to think of sound as simply an accompaniment to the real basis of cinema, the moving images.

This inclination lets sound designers create a world without our noticing. On the screen we may see merely an anxious face against a cloudy sky, but we may hear a fierce wind, a police siren, and a child's cry. Suddenly we conjure up a situation of danger. A low-budget horror film with awkward acting and unconvincing special effects can stir an audience to shrieks with disgusting slurps, snaps, and gurgles. "Sound is the biggest bang for your buck of anything in the movie business," says the manager of Skywalker Sound (7.2).

Fortunately, filmgoers have started to notice. *Star Wars* and other hits of the 1970s introduced the broad public to new technologies of sound recording and reproduction. Audiences came to expect Dolby noise reduction processes, expanded frequency and dynamic range, and four- and six-track theater playback. During the early 1990s, digital sound became routine for big-budget pictures, and now virtually all releases have crisp, dense sound tracks. "An older film like *Casablanca* has an empty soundtrack compared with what we do today," remarks the supervising sound editor for *Lost in Translation*. Today's romantic comedy is as densely packed with sound effects as an action picture was 20 years ago. Multiplex theaters upgraded their sound systems to meet filmmakers' challenges, and the popularity of DVDs prompted consumers to set up home theaters with ravishing sound.

Viewers' new sensitivity to sound is apparent in the custom of starting a film's sound track with dialogue or sound effects, before the images appear. You can argue that this device serves to quiet down the audience so that the opening scene gets the proper attention, but often the sonic information draws us slowly into the story. Many modern films lead us by the ear. Not since the first talkies of the late 1920s have filmgoers been so aware of what they hear.

The Powers of Sound

Sound is a powerful film technique for several reasons. For one thing, it engages a distinct sense mode. Even before recorded sound was introduced in 1926, silent films were accompanied by orchestra, organ, or piano. At a minimum, the music filled in the silence and gave the spectator a more complete experience. More significantly, the engagement of hearing opens the possibility of what the Soviet director Sergei Eisenstein called "synchronization of senses"—making a single rhythm or expressive quality bind together image and sound.

The meshing of image and sound appeals to something quite deep in human consciousness. Babies spontaneously connect sounds with what they see. For us, if a sound and image occur at the same moment, they tend to be perceived as one event, not two. Just as our minds search for patterns in a shot or for causal patterns in a narrative, we're inclined to seek out patterns that will fuse lip movements and speech. The power of musical structure to map onto visual structure is evident not only in dance but also when fans of the Pink Floyd album *The Dark Side of the Moon* play it back over *The Wizard of Oz*. Our bias toward audio-visual blending governs both our everyday activities and our experiences of arts like music, theater, and film.

Sound Shapes Our Understanding of Images

Sound is often treated as a lesser partner to the images, but we need to recognize that it can actively shape how we understand them. In one sequence of *Letter from Siberia* (7.3–7.6), Chris Marker demonstrates the power of sound to alter our understanding of what's onscreen. Three times Marker shows the same footage—a shot of a bus passing a car on a city street, three shots of workers paving a street. But each time the footage is accompanied by a completely different sound track. Compare the three versions tabulated alongside the sequence in Table 7.1. The first one is heavily affirmative, the second is harshly critical, and the third mixes praise and criticism. The audience will construe the same images differently, depending on the voice-over commentary.

Guiding Our Eye and Mind

The *Letter from Siberia* sequence demonstrates another advantage of film sound. It can steer our attention within the image. When the commentator describes the "blood-colored buses," we're likely to look at the buses, not the car.

Brian De Palma exploits the guiding function of sound in his conspiracy thriller *Blow-Out*. Jack Terry is a sound designer for low-budget exploitation films. While capturing environmental background noises, he records a deadly car crash. Jack takes his recording as proof that an assassin shot out the car's tire in order to kill the politician inside. A crooked detective was on the scene as well, and he shot a film of the crackup. Using still images from the detective's footage, Jack creates a mini-film he can synchronize with his recording (7.7–7.9). The result reveals a vital clue that was unnoticed in the published images.

What if the crucial item isn't in the shot at all? Suppose we have a shot of a man in a room. If we hear a door creaking, we anticipate that someone has entered the room, and we probably expect to see that person in the next shot. In other words, a simple sound can prod us to form expectations. Those can then be delayed, as in a horror film; in that genre, it's conventional to suggest an unseen menace but dwell on a character staring fearfully at something offscreen.


In addition, sound gives a new value to silence. A quiet passage can create almost unbearable tension, while an abrupt silence in a noisy passage can jolt us (7.10, 7.11). Most contemporary sound mixers drop in about a half-second of silence just before explosions and other loud noises. During the battle between Dumbledore and Voldemort in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, the sound team slipped in brief silences between Voldemort's attacks. The contrast made the thwacks seem abnormally loud. Just as color film turns black and white into grades of color, so sound can include all the resources of silence.

One more advantage: sound bristles with as many creative possibilities as editing. Through editing, one may join shots of any two spaces to create a meaningful relation. Similarly, the filmmaker can mix any sonic phenomena into a whole. With the introduction of sound cinema, the infinity of visual possibilities was joined by the infinity of acoustic events.

“The most exciting moment is the moment when I add the sound. . . . At this moment, I tremble.”

—Akira Kurosawa, director

TABLE 7.1 *Letter From Siberia* Footage

Images	First Commentary	Second Commentary	Third Commentary
	Yakutsk, capital of the Yakutsk Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, is a modern city in which comfortable buses made available to the population share the streets with powerful Zyms, the pride of the Soviet automobile industry. In the	Yakutsk is a dark city with an evil reputation. The population is crammed into blood-colored buses while the members of the privileged caste brazenly display the luxury of their Zyms—costly and uncomfortable cars at best. Bending	In Yakutsk, where modern houses are gradually replacing the dark older sections, a bus, less crowded than its London or New York equivalent at rush hour, passes a Zym, an excellent car reserved for public utilities departments on account of its scarcity.
	joyful spirit of socialist emulation, happy Soviet workers, among them this picturesque denizen	to the task like slaves, the miserable Soviet workers, among them this sinister looking Asiatic,	With courage and tenacity under extremely difficult conditions, Soviet workers, among them this Yakut
	of the Arctic reaches, apply themselves	apply themselves to the primitive labor	afflicted with an eye disorder, apply themselves to
	to making Yakutsk an even better place to live. Or else:	of grading with a drag beam. Or simply:	improving the appearance of their city, which could certainly use it.



7.7



7.8



7.9

7.7–7.9 Sound reveals a clue. In *Blow-Out*, Jack studies his DIY film made from magazine photographs (7.7). He synchronizes his tape with the image track (7.8). When the two play together, the blowout sound matches a flash from the bushes near a fence post (7.9). The flash was visible in the replayed footage, but it took the sound track to make Jack and the audience notice it.



7.10



7.11

7.10–7.11 Subjective silence. In *Babel*, when the deaf teenage girl enters the disco, the club music is about to climax (7.10). Instead, it drops out when we cut to her optical point-of-view on the boy she's following (7.11). Instead of subjective sound, we get subjective silence, and this sharply dramatizes her isolation from what is happening around her.

Fundamentals of Film Sound

Film sound can include any mixture of speech, music, and noise. Filmmakers make decisions about the types and density of sounds as well as their properties, including loudness and pitch.

Perceptual Properties

Several aspects of film sound are familiar to us from everyday experience.

Loudness The sounds we hear result from vibrations in the air. The amplitude, or breadth, of the vibrations produces our sense of *loudness*, or volume.

Filmmakers manipulate volume constantly. A long shot of a busy street is accompanied by traffic noises, but when two people meet and start to speak, the



7.12 Manipulating volume for intelligibility. Establishing shots at the start of *Norma Rae* show the textile factory full of deafening machine noise, so that we register the harsh working conditions. As the story action starts, the noise is turned down so that the women's dialogue in the break room will be audible.

loudness of the traffic diminishes (7.12). A conversation between a soft-spoken character and a blustery one is characterized as much by volume as by what they say. Much of the comedy in Mel Brooks's *The Producers* comes from the contrast between the voices of booming Max Bialystock and meek accountant Leo Bloom.

Although loudness can be measured in precise acoustic terms, for the listener it's relative. A lengthy passage of high-amplitude sound may not sound as loud as a lower burst of sound after a stretch of silence. In *Capote*, a killer's confession is presented in a nearly quiet scene, with only the wind audible. That ambience makes the shotgun blast that follows seem exceptionally loud. As with mise-en-scene and the tonal qualities of the image, the sound track seizes our attention through contrast.

Loudness is also related to perceived distance. All other things being equal, the louder the sound, the closer we take it to be. This sort of assumption seems to be at work in the street traffic example already mentioned: The couple's dialogue, being closer to us, is sensed as louder, while the traffic noise recedes to the background. In addition, a film may startle the viewer by exploiting abrupt and extreme shifts in volume (usually called changes in *dynamics*), as when a quiet scene is interrupted by a very loud noise. Changes in loudness may be combined with cutting or camera movement to reinforce our sense of moving toward or away from the source of the noise (7.13–7.15).

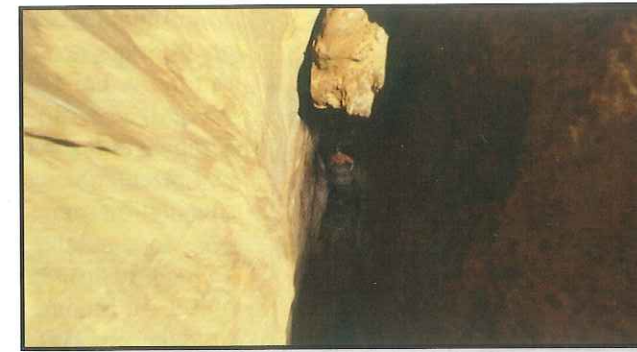
Pitch The frequency of sound vibrations affects *pitch*, or the perceived highness or lowness of the sound. Most sounds, in life and on film, are complex tones, in batches of different frequencies. Pitch helps our ear sort out the sounds.

Very low-pitched sounds suggest rumbling, whereas very high-pitched ones suggest tinkling. Pitch helps us distinguish music and speech from background noise. The filmmaker can use pitch to distinguish objects too. A thump suggests the object is hollow, but high-pitched jingle bells suggest smoother, harder objects.

Pitch can serve more specific purposes. We've already mentioned the effect of an octave leap in the song "Over the Rainbow" in *The Wizard of Oz* (p. 62). When a young boy tries to speak in a man's deep voice and fails, as in *How Green Was My Valley*, the joke is based primarily on pitch. Marlene Dietrich's vocal delivery often depends on a long upward-gliding intonation that makes a statement sound like a question. In the coronation scene of *Ivan the Terrible*, Part I, a court singer with a deep bass voice begins a song of praise to Ivan, and



7.13



7.14



7.15

7.13–7.15 Volume as a cue for distance. A hiker is trapped at the bottom of a canyon in *127 Hours*. One shot begins on a high-angle shot of him shouting for help (7.13). As the camera pulls quickly up and away from him, his cries diminish in volume (7.14), until the shot ends on an extreme long view of the desert, with the canyon a dark line in the landscape and the hiker's voice no longer audible (7.15). Director Danny Boyle uses sound perspective, timed with drastic changes of shot scale, to dramatize how hopeless the young man's plight is.

each phrase rises dramatically in pitch (7.16–7.18). When Bernard Herrmann obtained the effects of shrill, birdlike shrieking in Hitchcock's *Psycho*, even many musicians could not recognize the source: violins played at extraordinarily high pitch.

Timbre The harmonic components of sound give it a certain color, or tone quality—what musicians call *timbre*. When we call someone's voice nasal or a musical tone mellow, we're referring to timbre. Timbre is actually a less fundamental acoustic parameter than amplitude or frequency, but it's indispensable in describing the texture or "feel" of a sound. In everyday life, the recognition of a familiar sound is largely a matter of various aspects of timbre.



7.16



7.17



7.18

7.16–7.18 Pitch synchronized with cutting. In *Ivan the Terrible*, Eisenstein emphasizes changes in vocal pitch by cutting from a medium-long shot (7.16) to a medium shot (7.17) to a close-up of the singer (7.18).

Filmmakers rely on timbre constantly. An actor's voice—Sean Connery's gruff Scots accent, Tom Waits's plaintive rasp—becomes distinctive, thanks to timbre. For Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*, Robbie Benson's speaking voice was mixed with tiger and lion sounds to enhance the Beast's animalistic side. Timbre, along with pitch, distinguishes musical instruments from each other, and often enhances emotion, as when sultry saxophone music comes up during a seduction scene.

More subtly, in the opening sequence of Rouben Mamoulian's *Love Me Tonight*, people starting the day on a street pass a musical rhythm from object to object—a broom, a carpet beater—and the humor of the number springs in part from the very different timbres of the objects. In preparing the sound track for Peter Weir's *Witness*, the editors drew on sounds recorded 20 or more years before, so that the less modern timbre of the older recordings would evoke the rustic seclusion of the Amish community.

Loudness, pitch, and timbre define the overall sonic texture of a film. For example, these qualities enable us to recognize different characters' voices. Both John Wayne and James Stewart speak slowly, but Wayne's voice tends to be deeper and gruffer than Stewart's querulous drawl. This difference works to great advantage in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, where their characters are sharply contrasted. In *The Wizard of Oz*, the disparity between the public image of the Wizard and the old charlatan who rigs it up is marked by the booming bass of the huge green head and the old man's higher, softer, more quavering voice. During an action sequence, the threshold for loudness is raised, so the film's sound designer may have to introduce noises of different frequencies or textures—a whining bullet during a rumbling car chase, for example—to make sure that certain details aren't drowned out.

These basic sound qualities can also shape our experience of a film as a whole. *Citizen Kane*, for example, offers a wide range of sound manipulations. Echo chambers alter timbre and volume. A motif is formed by the inability of Kane's wife, Susan, to sing pitches accurately. Moreover, in *Citizen Kane*, the plot's shifts between times and places are covered by continuing a sound thread and varying the basic acoustics. A shot of Kane applauding dissolves to a shot of a crowd applauding (a shift in volume and timbre). Leland beginning a sentence in the street cuts to Kane finishing the sentence in an auditorium, his voice magnified by loudspeakers (a shift in volume, timbre, and pitch).

Sound processes create wider ranges of frequency and volume, as well as crisper timbres than filmmakers could achieve in the studio years. Today sound editors can individualize voice or noise to a surprising degree. For *The Thin Red Line*, every character's distinctive breathing sounds were recorded for use as ambient noise. Randy Thoms, sound designer for *Cast Away*, sought to characterize different sorts of wind—breezes from the open sea, winds in a cave. Sound even announces a shift in wind direction crucial to one of the hero's plans. "We can use the wind in a very musical way," Thoms notes.

Recording, Altering, and Combining Sounds

Sound in the cinema is of three types: speech, music, and noise (usually called *sound effects*). Occasionally a sound may cross categories—Is a yell classified as speech or noise?—and filmmakers have exploited these ambiguities. In *Psycho*, when a woman screams, we expect to hear a voice but instead hear violins. Still, in most cases, the distinctions hold. Now that we have an idea of some basic acoustic properties, how are speech, music, and sound effects captured?

Recording Dialogue is usually recorded during filming, but that isn't the version we will hear in the finished film. The dialogue in the film has been dubbed, or "looped," later in a recording studio. In a process called automated

dialogue recording (ADR), actors repeat their lines while watching the footage in "looped playback." The dialogue recorded during shooting guides the ADR process.

Music is almost never recorded during principal photography, unless the filmmaker is documenting a musical performance, as in concert films like *Stop Making Sense*, *U2 3D*, and *Year of the Horse*. Much more often, music is added in postproduction. The track might be a selection of existing pieces, such as popular songs, or it might be a score written specifically for the film. Recording a score involves the composer leading the musicians through each cue while watching the footage projected on a screen.

Like music, most sound effects are added during postproduction. A common method is the Foley process, which creates noises tailored to each scene. In a sonically clean studio, experts record people pouring drinks, splashing in mud, rubbing sandpaper, and any other actions that put human movement in contact with surfaces. Foley artists, who often collect shoes, fabrics, and car doors, also devise imaginative equivalents. Foley artist Joan Rowe used a package of liver from the supermarket to get the "liquid and friendly" sound of the title character of *E.T.: The Extraterrestrial*.

Not all postproduction sound is generated from scratch. A great many postproduction sound effects are culled from libraries. During the studio era, Hollywood's libraries cataloged more than 100,000 distinct sounds. A "Biffs and Bangs" file, for instance, might contain an assortment of the kicks, slaps, and punches associated with fight scenes. The most famous library effect is the "Wilhelm scream," first heard in a 1951 American film when an alligator bites off a cowboy's arm. The scream was recycled in *Star Wars*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *Reservoir Dogs*, *Transformers*, and over a hundred other films. (Google "Wilhelm scream" and you can hear it online.) Sound editors also build their personal collections of noises that intrigue them.

Sometimes the sound track is conceived before the image track. In a musical, the camera films singers and players who are miming to a prerecorded track. Even dancers' footwork, like taps or stomps, will already be on the playback. That track will be married to the filmed images during the editing process. Animated cartoons typically record music, dialogue, and sound effects before camera capture begins, so the action onscreen will match the sound frame by frame. For the adventures of Bugs Bunny and Daffy Duck, Carl Stalling created frantically paced jumbles of familiar tunes, weird noises, and distinctive voices.

Reworking Sound Once the sounds are captured, the creation of the film's sound track resembles the editing of the image track. Just as you can pick the best image from several shots, you may choose what exact bit of sound will serve your purpose. And just as a shot's color or lighting may be manipulated in postproduction, a sound may be processed to change its acoustic qualities.

A common form of manipulation is blending. The noises emitted by the demonically possessed girl in *The Exorcist* consist of screams, animal thrashings, and English spoken backward. To create the roar of a *Tyrannosaurus rex* for *Jurassic Park*, sound engineers blended a tiger's roar, a baby elephant's trumpeting, and an alligator's growl for lower tones. To characterize a runaway train as a primal force, *Unstoppable* gave it an auditory identity derived from the sounds of beasts. After smashing another train in its path, the rogue locomotive even lets out a bellow of triumph.

Selection Guides Our Attention As you read this, you are attending to words on the page and (to various degrees) ignoring certain stimuli that reach your ears. But if you close your eyes and listen keenly, you'll become aware of background sounds—traffic, footsteps, distant voices. You know that if you set up a

“The Empire spaceship sounded a certain way as compared to the Imperial fleet; that was a deliberate style change. Everybody in the Empire had shrieking, howling, ghostlike, frightening sounds. . . . You hear it—you jump with fear. Whereas the rebel forces had more junky-sounding planes and spaceships. They weren't quite as powerful; they tended to pop and sputter more.”

—Ben Burtt, sound editor, *Star Wars*

“Too many films seem essentially designed to be heard in the mixing studios. I always fight against recording every single footstep, and would rather lose the sound of people settling into armchairs, etc., and fade out a particular atmosphere sound once the emotional impact has been achieved, even at the cost of realism. You have to know how to play with silence, to treat sound like music.”

—Bernard Tavernier, director

“We're always looking for things that squeak or clank or make springy, sproingy noises. If you go to a swap meet or garage sale, you're always putting your ear up to things and listening. The weirdest thing is when you listen to things in the grocery store—tap on vegetables and rustle them and crunch them a little.”

—Marnie Moore, Foley artist, *Boogie Nights*, *Jarhead*

“We were going for a documentary feel. We came up with a way for the loop group actors to say lines in a way we called ‘nondescript dialogue.’ They said lines, but they didn’t say the actual words. If you put it behind people speaking, you just think it’s people talking offscreen, but your ear isn’t drawn to it. It would just lie there as a bed, and you can play it relatively loudly and it just fits in with the scenes.”

—Hugh Waddell, ADR supervisor, on *The Thin Red Line*

microphone and recorder in what seems to be a quiet environment, those normally unnoticed sounds can become obtrusive. The microphone is unselective; like the camera lens, it doesn’t automatically filter out what’s distracting.

It’s up to the filmmaker to make what’s important stand out. Normally, the sound track is clarified and simplified so that important material stands out. Dialogue, as a transmitter of story information, is usually recorded and reproduced for maximum clarity. Important lines should not have to compete with music or background noise. Sound effects are usually less important than speech. They supply an overall sense of a realistic environment and are seldom noticed; if they were missing, however, the silence would be distracting. Music is usually subordinate to dialogue as well, entering during pauses in conversation or in passages without dialogue.

All of these customs have become conventions. Christopher Nolan learned how strong those conventions are when he included muffled dialogue in *Interstellar*. “There are particular moments in the film where I decided to use dialogue as a sound effect, so sometimes it’s mixed slightly underneath the other sound effects or in the other sound effects to emphasize how loud the surrounding noise is. It’s not that nobody has ever done these things before, but it’s a little unconventional for a Hollywood movie.” Some viewers, though, assumed there was a technical problem with the screening. Nolan was asking the audience to adjust their expectations to a sound mix that didn’t put dialogue at the top.

Dialogue doesn’t always rank highest in importance, though. Sound effects are usually central to action sequences, while music can dominate dance scenes, transitional sequences, or emotion-laden moments without dialogue. And some filmmakers have shifted the weight conventionally assigned to each type of sound. Charlie Chaplin’s *City Lights* and *Modern Times* eliminate dialogue, letting sound effects and music come to the fore. The films of Jacques Tati and Jean-Marie Straub retain dialogue but still place great emphasis on sound effects. In Robert Bresson’s *A Man Escaped*, music and noise fill out a sparse dialogue track by evoking off-screen space and creating thematic associations.

By choosing only certain sounds, the filmmaker guides our perception of the action. In one scene from Jacques Tati’s *Mr. Hulot’s Holiday*, vacationers at a resort hotel are relaxing (7.19). Early in the scene, the guests in the foreground are murmuring quietly, but Hulot’s Ping-Pong game is louder; the sound cues us to watch Hulot. Later in the scene, however, the same Ping-Pong game makes no sound at all, and our attention is drawn to the muttering cardplayers in the foreground. The presence and absence of the sound of the Ping-Pong ball guides our expectations. If you start to notice how such selection of sound shapes our perception, you will also notice that filmmakers often use sound quite unrealistically, to shift our attention to what is narratively or visually important.

Our scene from *Mr. Hulot’s Holiday* also points up the importance of how a chosen sound may have its acoustic qualities transformed for a particular purpose. Thanks to a manipulation of volume and timbre, the Ping-Pong game gains in vividness. When two sounds are of the same frequency or loudness, contemporary sound designers freely adjust one to make it stand out more clearly. During the jungle chase in *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull*, the skull’s thump was altered. “I changed its pitch so that it would coexist with the music,” sound designer Ben Burtt explained.

Nowadays, film sound is normally reprocessed to yield exactly the qualities desired. A dry recording of the



7.19 Sound present, then absent. In *Mr. Hulot’s Holiday*, in the foreground, guests quietly play cards while in the depth of the shot, Mr. Hulot is frantically playing Ping-Pong. Sometimes we hear the ball, sometimes not.

sound in a fairly nonreflective space will be manipulated electronically to yield the desired effect. Returning to our earlier example, if you chose to present Amanda’s dialogue as heard on Jim’s phone, her voice would probably have been treated with filters to make it more tinny and muffled. (In Hollywood parlance, this is called “futz” the sound.) The almost nonstop rock-and-roll music of *American Graffiti* used two recordings of the music. A dry one was prepared for moments when the music was to dominate the scene and had to be of high quality. A more ambient one for background noise was derived from a tape recorder simply playing the tune in a backyard.

Sound Mixing Guiding the viewer’s attention, then, depends on selecting and reworking particular sounds. It also depends on **mixing**, or combining them. It is useful to think of the sound track not as a set of discrete sound bits but as an ongoing stream of auditory information. Each sound takes its place in a specific pattern. This pattern both links events in time and layers them at any given moment.

The auditory stream goes beyond linking one line of dialogue or bit of noise to another. It involves a constant set of decisions about how it meshes with the image track. For example, there are many fine-grained choices involved in blending the stream of sound with classical principles of continuity editing.

CREATIVE DECISIONS

Editing Dialogue: To Overlap or Not to Overlap?

If the soundtrack is a stream, the current may carry auditory elements to the surface or sink them out of awareness. One decision that faces the filmmaker involves that current: Should it be choppy or smoothly flowing?

Consider dialogue scenes. Thinking like a filmmaker, we can see that there are many choices about the timing of picture editing. You have to decide when to cut from a shot of A to a shot of B. But another choice is involved, too: How do you cut the dialogue? Editor Tom Rolfe puts it well:

Is it better to say, “I love you,” bang, then cut to the reaction? Or is it better to say, “I love you,” hang on it a beat to show the emotion of the person delivering the line, then go for the reaction? It’s a matter of choice. Either way, there’s a different result for the audience looking at it. Are their sympathies with the guy who said the line, or the girl who said the line? Or is the audience saying, “Don’t believe him, he’s going to screw you over!” . . . If you find the frame to cut on at that right moment, the audience will be totally satisfied.

There’s another alternative. Instead of cutting after the line or holding on the speaker for a beat, you might cut away from the speaker before the line is finished (“I love . . .”) to anticipate the reaction of the listener to the final syllables (“. . . you!”). Since there are plenty of shot/reverse-shot conversation scenes in movies, and a lot of cutting in those scenes, decision points like these emerge hundreds of times in making most films.

In such situations, filmmakers frequently pick the third option just mentioned, the **dialogue overlap**. In this technique, the filmmaker continues a line of dialogue across a cut, smoothing over the change of shot. During a conversation in John McTiernan’s *The Hunt for Red October*, we get the following shots and dialogue:

- (ms) Over the political officer’s shoulder, favoring Captain Ramius (7.20)
Officer: “Captain Tupalev’s boat.”
Ramius: “You know Tupalev?”
Officer: “I know he descends . . .”

“Spending two days on Alcatraz Island for *The Rock* brought home the eerie, lonely feel to the sound. Anyone who spent any time there and heard the soundtrack would be instantly transported to this place, which has its own unique sound signature. It is very windy, so you have lots of wind whistles setting the mood, combined with seagulls and a lighthouse electric horn, interior jail cell ambiances, and the jail door sounds. These individually common elements, when combined, became quite distinctive in this particular location.”

—George Watters, supervising sound editor



7.20 Shot 1



7.21 Shot 2



7.22 Shot 3

7.20–7.22 Dialogue overlap in *The Hunt for Red October*

2. (ms) Reverse angle over Ramius's shoulder, favoring the officer (7.21)
Officer (continuing): "... from aristocracy, and that he was your student. It's rumored he has a special . . ."
3. (mcu) Reverse angle on Ramius (7.22)
Officer (continuing): "... place in his heart for you."
Ramius: "There's little room in Tupalev's heart for anyone but Tupalev."

Here the political officer's chatter provides an auditory continuity that distracts from the shot changes. Moreover, by cutting to a closer view of the listener before a sentence is finished, the sound and editing concentrate our attention on Ramius's response. The principle of dialogue overlap can be used with noise as well. In the *Hunt for Red October* scene, sounds of a spoon clinking in a tea cup and of papers being riffled also carry over certain cuts, providing a continuous stream of sonic information.

Sometimes the filmmaker wants to introduce more tension. In Fritz Lang's *M*, the city is on edge because a child murderer is at large. An unprepossessing little man urges a little girl to go home, but onlookers suspect him of being the killer. One comes up to him challengingly.

1. (ls) The little man is accosted by a huge one, who asks, "What's it to you where she lives?"
The first man turns (7.23).
2. (ms) High-angle POV on the little man (7.24)
Little man: "I?" Although intimidated, he starts to speak.
3. (ms): Low angle POV on the big man (7.25)
Little man (offscreen): "Excuse me?"
Big man: "What do you want with that kid?" (pause)
4. (ms) as 2 (7.26)
Little man (pause): "Absolutely nothing!"



7.23 Shot 1



7.24 Shot 2



7.25 Shot 3



7.26 Shot 4

7.23–7.26 Cuts emphasize pauses in dialogue in *M*.

Here the cuts accentuate the suspense evoked by the pauses. In shot 2, the little man takes time to register the danger he's in. When he finally summons up a feeble self-defense ("Excuse me?"), it is heard offscreen. Lang forces us to wait for the ominous question from the thug, which is uttered in full. In shot 4, the little man gets to assert himself fully. After another pause, he defends himself, and his line isn't interrupted by a cut. The pattern of cutting has given his denial a greater weight because we didn't see him speak during shot 3, and shot 4 plays out his entire line.

Lang was perfectly capable of overlapping sound across his cuts. *M* does it throughout; in fact, the next line the little man speaks initiates a dialogue overlap. By aligning certain cuts with dramatic pauses in the dialogue, Lang gives special weight to the lines spoken by the thug in shot 3 and his innocent target in shot 4. As usual, different stylistic choices produce different effects onscreen.

Layers and Contrasts The sounds flow not only in streams but also in layers. We have already seen that in production, combining sounds is usually done after shooting, in the mixing process. The mixer can precisely control the volume, duration, and tone quality of each sound, weaving them in and out, making them momentarily clear or pushing them out of hearing. For example, in *Jurassic Park*, Steven Spielberg manipulates volume unrealistically for purposes of narrative clarity. After a live cow has been lowered into the velociraptors' pen, the South African hunter gives important information about the habits of these predators, and his



7.27 Selective sound volume. In *Jurassic Park*, Hammond and Ellie are closer to the camera than is anything else in the shot, but their dialogue is an unintelligible murmur. In the background, the hunter supplies important information about the velociraptors, and that is clearly audible.



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We've been fortunate enough to sit in on some mixing sessions and learn from people who mix sound. See "Christian Bale picks up a rail," "What does a Water Horse sound like?" and "The Boy in the Black Hole."

“For the last few years—since *Blue Velvet*, I think—I have tried to do most of the music before the shoot. I discuss the story with my composer, Angelo Badalamenti, and record all sorts of music that I listen to as I’m shooting the film, either on headphones during dialogue scenes or on loudspeakers, so that the whole crew gets in the right mood. It’s a great tool. It’s like a compass helping you find the right direction.”

—David Lynch, director

voice comes through louder than those of characters closer to the camera (7.27).

In modern filmmaking, a dozen or more separate tracks may be layered at any moment. The mix can be quite dense. An airport scene may combine the babble of voices, footsteps, luggage trolleys, Muzak, and plane engines. Or the mix can be very sparse, with an occasional sound emerging against a background of total silence. That's what happens in the *M* scene (7.23–7.26), where no ambient sound distracts from the confrontation of the two men. Most cases will fall somewhere between a thick mix and a thin one. In our *Hunt for Red October* scene (7.20–7.22), a distant throbbing engine and slight brushings of fabric form a muted background to the conversation.

The filmmaker may create a mix in which each sound blends smoothly with the others. This is commonly the case when music and effects are mixed with speech. In classical

Hollywood cinema of the 1930s, the musical score may become prominent in moments in which there is no dialogue, and then it's likely to fade unnoticeably down just as the characters begin to talk. (In studio parlance, this is called *sneaking in* and *sneaking out*.) This sort of smooth rising and falling pattern provides a clearer, simpler sound world than we encounter in everyday life. The legendary sound designer Walter Murch carefully limits the amount of sound information he provides viewers. "There is a rule of thumb I use, which is never to give the audience more than two-and-a-half things to think about aurally at any one moment." In Murch's mix for *The English Patient*, when the nurse feeds the patient a plum, a distant church bell rings. The clean auditory background makes the bell an evocative overtone, suggesting that the hospital is a calm refuge from the war.

Alternatively, the acoustic stream may contain much more abrupt contrasts. In *The Godfather*, just as Michael Corleone is steeling himself to shoot the rival gangster Sollozzo, we hear a loud, metallic screech, presumably from a nearby elevated train. The sound suggests impending danger, both for the victim and for Michael: After the murder, Michael's life will change irrevocably (7.28). Hollywood films often exploit the dynamic range of Dolby technology to fill chase sequences with startling shifts between low, rumbling engines and whining sirens or squealing tires.

Yet another alternative is explored in Alexander Sokurov's *Alexandra*. A soldier's grandmother visits him at his camp and wanders freely among the men preparing for war. The sound track includes naturalistic dialogue and effects. But these conventional elements are wrapped in soft voices, orchestral chords, and snatches of rising and falling soprano singing. The murmuring auditory collage suggests a collective dimension to the old lady's stay, as if she is visiting on behalf of the unseen families of all the men, perhaps all soldiers' families throughout history.

A Dramatic Sound Stream: *Seven Samurai* Akira Kurosawa was well aware of how sounds can combine to create a stream of information, as we can see from the final battle sequence of his *Seven Samurai*. In a heavy rain, marauding bandits charge into a village defended by the villagers and the samurai. Kurosawa chooses to keep the torrent and wind as a constant background noise. Before the battle, he punctuates the conversation of the waiting men, the tread of footsteps, and the sound of swords being drawn with long pauses in which we hear only the drumming rain. Like the defenders, we're uncertain about when and how the attack will come.

Suddenly distant horses' hooves are heard offscreen. This triggers the expectation that we will soon see the attackers. Kurosawa cuts to a long shot of

the bandits; their horses' hooves become abruptly louder. (The scene employs vivid **sound perspective**: The closer the camera is to a source, the louder the sound.) When the bandits burst into the village, yet another sound element appears—the bandits' harsh war cries, which increase steadily in volume as they approach.

The battle begins. The rhythmic cutting and the muddy, storm-swept *mise-en-scène* gain impact from the way in which the incessant rain and splashing are explosively interrupted by brief noises—the howls of the wounded, the splintering of a fence one bandit crashes through, the whinnies of horses, the twang of a samurai's bowstring, the gurgle of a speared bandit, the screams of women when the bandit chieftain breaks into their hiding place. The sudden intrusion of certain sounds marks abrupt developments in the battle, standing out against the pounding rain. Such frequent surprises heighten our tension, as the narration rapidly snaps us from one line of action to another.

The scene climaxes after the main battle has ended. Offscreen the pounding of horses' hooves is cut short by the sharp crack of a bandit's rifle shot, which fells one samurai. A long pause, in which we hear only the rain, emphasizes the moment. The samurai furiously flings his sword in the direction of the shot and falls dead into the mud. Another samurai splashes toward the bandit chieftain, who has the rifle; another shot cracks out and he falls back, wounded; another pause, in which only the relentless rain is heard. The wounded samurai kills the chieftain. The other samurai gather. At the scene's end, the sobs of a young samurai, the distant whinnies and hoof beats of riderless horses, and the rain all fade slowly out.

Kurosawa's relatively dense mix gradually introduces sounds that turn our attention to new narrative elements (hooves, battle cries) and then modulates these sounds into a harmonious stream. This stream is then punctuated by abrupt sounds of unusual volume or pitch associated with crucial narrative actions (hooves, archery, women's screams, gunshots). Overall, the combination of sounds enhances the unrestricted, objective narration of this sequence, which shows us what happens in various parts of the village rather than confining us to the experience of a single participant.

Sound and Film Form By choosing and combining sound materials, the filmmaker can create engaging patterns that run through the whole film. The process is most evident in a film's musical score.

Sometimes the filmmaker picks preexisting pieces of music to accompany the images. Directors like Stanley Kubrick and Terrence Malick are known for their bold choices of classical music, whereas others, like Wes Anderson or Quentin Tarantino, select older pop songs to give their films a hipster cachet.

In other cases, music is composed for the film, and here the filmmaker and the composer make several choices. The rhythm, melody, harmony, tempo, volume, and instrumentation of the music can strongly affect a viewer's emotional reactions. We've already seen how the commentary track of *Letter from Siberia* created different impressions of the footage. The same thing can happen with music alone. A close-up of an actor with a neutral expression may seem happy, excited, melancholy, or disturbed, depending on the kind of music that accompanies the image. Near the end of *Queen Christina*, the heroine renounces her throne in order to marry the Spanish envoy she loves. After he dies in a duel, Christina sails from Sweden to live in his homeland. Director Rouben Mamoulian told star Greta Garbo to maintain a neutral expression in the final shot as the camera tracks into a tight close-up of her on the ship's deck. We might expect to hear



7.28 Harsh sound contrasts: *The Godfather*. As Michael sits opposite Sollozzo, the sudden rumble and whine of an offscreen train sound all the more harsh when compared with the calm expression on Michael's face.

“It’s a lot like writing an opera. There’s a lot of form and structure. We’re very conscious that LOTR is one story that has been broken into three parts. My score is a complex piece that has to be structured carefully, musically and thematically, so that all the parts relate to one another.”

—Howard Shore, composer, *The Lord of the Rings*

mournful music, but instead a triumphant melody suggests Christina's courage and determination.

A melody or musical phrase can be associated with a particular character, setting, situation, or idea. The ominous, two-note motif played in the lower strings in *Jaws* (1975) becomes a musical signal of the shark's movement toward his victims. The brassy fanfare for *Star Wars* (1977) captures Luke Skywalker's bravery and impetuosity.

As in opera and musical comedy, themes can intertwine. *Local Hero*, a film about a confused young executive who leaves Texas to close a business deal in a remote Scottish village, uses two major musical themes. A rockabilly tune is heard in the urban Southwest, whereas a slower, more poignantly folkish melody is associated with the seaside village. In the final scenes, after the young man has returned to Houston, he recalls Scotland with affection, and the film plays the two themes simultaneously.

In contrast, a single musical theme can change its quality when associated with different situations. In *Raising Arizona*, the hapless hero has a terrifying dream in which he envisions a homicidal biker pursuing him, and the accompanying music is appropriately ominous. But at the film's end, the hero dreams of raising dozens of children, and now the same melody, reorchestrated and played at a calm tempo, conveys a sense of peace and comfort.

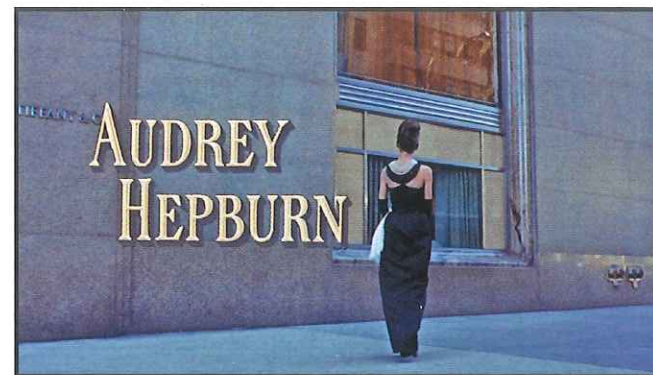
Musical Motifs in *Breakfast at Tiffany's*

Musical motifs can subtly compare scenes, trace patterns of development, and suggest implicit meanings. Henry Mancini's score for Blake Edwards' *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961) mixes jazz and pop elements to reflect vibrant, cosmopolitan New York City. At the same time, the film employs musical themes to suggest traits of character and situation.

The film's main musical theme, "Moon River," hints at Holly Golightly's rural past. Mancini claimed that the concept of the score grew out of the lonesome, melancholy timbre of the harmonica, an instrument associated with American folk music. The theme first appears over the film's opening shots of Holly exiting a cab near Fifth Avenue. She walks over to the display windows of Tiffany's jewelry store (7.29). Later, the visuals echo the film's title by showing Holly munching a croissant and drinking coffee, but the music tells a somewhat different story. The guitar and harmonica sounds seem an odd choice to accompany shots of New York City. Yet the orchestration reflects character traits rather than setting. The harmonica in "Moon River" expresses Holly's pervasive sense of wistful longing. Its rural association foreshadows the later revelation that she was once Lulamae Barnes, a child bride living in Tulip, Texas, married to a widowed veterinarian.

Repetitions of "Moon River" help to develop the storyline of Holly's past. When Holly beds down next to Paul early in the film, "Moon River" plays over vibraphone chords, its wavering vibrato adding a pensive tone as Holly talks in her sleep (7.30). "Moon River" returns in the bus-station scene in which Holly bids a tearful adieu to Doc Golightly, her former husband (7.31). This arrangement places the theme in the high register of the violins, a musical technique that often indicates strong passions and emotional conflict. Mancini's arrangement captures Holly's feelings by expressing her sadness at abandoning a man she loves, but whose life she cannot share.

At the film's climax, "Moon River" underscores the search for Cat, who Holly capriciously turns loose in an alley during a rainstorm. Holly's gesture demonstrates both her complete independence and her desire to escape the limelight of scandal-infested New York. Holly's emotional resolve softens, though, after



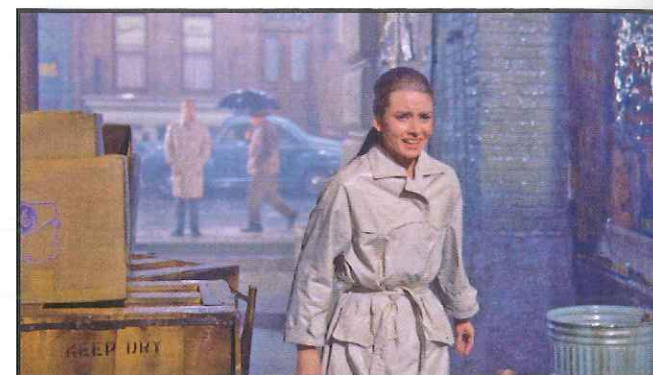
7.29



7.30



7.31



7.32



7.33

7.29–7.33 Music suggests narrative development. Henry Mancini's "Moon River" is introduced during the film's opening credits (7.29), but reappears later in the film to recall Holly's past as a "wild thing." Scenes show Holly talking in her sleep (7.30), bidding good-bye to Doc Golightly (7.31), and searching for Cat (7.32). A final variant of the theme enters for the couple's embrace (7.33).

Paul rebukes her for failing to let anyone penetrate her brittle shell. Regretting her impetuous decision, Holly joins Paul as they search the alley (7.32). Here the "Moon River" melody plays in a minor key over the lurching rhythm of dissonant piano chords. When Holly finds Cat hiding in a cardboard box, the melody returns to a major key and a slow, simple waltz tempo.

Holly and Paul's reconciliation is emphasized by a lush arrangement of the theme for orchestra and chorus that signals a happy ending (7.33). By tailoring each cue's harmony, orchestration, and meter to the needs of each scene, Mancini makes "Moon River" not only dramatically appropriate but a reminder of the rural motif that runs through the film.



A CLOSER LOOK

Orchestrating Romance in *Jules and Jim*

Breakfast at Tiffany's adapts its major melody to the drama of Holly's New York life. Francois Truffaut's *Jules and Jim* ties three musical motifs to different aspects of a character. In the process, it traces how a love triangle passes from light-hearted friendship to melancholy and revenge.

Overall, Georges Delerue's score evokes the Paris of 1912–1933, the years during which the action takes place. Many of the melodies resemble works by Claude Debussy and Erik Satie, two prominent composers of the period. But Delerue constrains himself by limiting nearly the whole score to melodies in 3/4 meter. Many of the tunes are in waltz time, and all the main themes are in keys related to A major. The choice of rhythm and tempo fits the characters' carefree youth, as if they are dancing an endless waltz, while the changes in harmony express the more somber turn that the action will take.

Jules and Jim compete for Catherine's favors, and she enjoys flitting between them. Her view of life is conveyed by her "Tourbillon" ("Whirlwind") song, which says that life consists of constantly changing romantic partners. But as the trio's relationship becomes more strained over the years, the score reflects this in the development of major motifs.

A lyrical melody is first heard when Jules, Jim, and Catherine visit the countryside and bicycle to the beach (7.34). This "idyll" tune will recur at many points when the characters reunite, but as the years pass, it will become

slower in tempo and more somber in instrumentation, and will shift from a major to a minor mode.

Another motif that reappears in different guises is a "dangerous love" theme associated with Jim and Catherine. This grave, shimmering waltz is first heard when he visits her apartment and watches her pour a bottle of sulphuric acid down the sink (7.35). (The acid, she says, is "for lying eyes.") Afterward, this harmonically unstable theme, which resembles one of Satie's *Gymnopédies* for piano, is used to underscore Jim and Catherine's stormy love affair. At times it accompanies scenes of passion, but at other times it accompanies their growing disillusionment and despair.

The most varied theme is a mysterious phrase first heard on the flute when Jules and Jim encounter a striking ancient statue (7.36). Later they meet Catherine and discover that she has the statue's face; a repetition of the musical motif confirms the comparison. Throughout the film, this brief motif is associated with the enigmatic side of Catherine.

In the film's later scenes, this motif is developed in an intriguing way. The bass line (played on harpsichord or strings) that softly accompanied the woodwind tune now comes to the fore, creating a relentless, often harsh, pulsation. This "menace" waltz underscores Catherine's fling with Albert and accompanies her final revenge on Jim: driving her car, with him as passenger, off a broken bridge and into the river.



7.34



7.35



7.36

7.34–7.36 *Jules and Jim*: Three musical motifs. An idyllic bicycle ride in the country introduces the main musical theme associated with the three characters' relations (7.34). Catherine pours out the acid, which she has said is "for lying eyes," accompanied by the "dangerous love" theme." (7.35). The camera slowly arcs around the statue as a new musical motif is introduced (7.36).

Once musical motifs have been selected, they can be combined to evoke associations. During Jim and Catherine's first intimate talk after the war, the bass-line-dominated version of the enigma waltz is followed by the love theme, as if the latter could drown out the menacing side of Catherine's character. The love theme accompanies long tracking shots of Jim and Catherine strolling through the woods. But at the scene's end, as Jim bids Catherine farewell, the original woodwind version of her theme recalls her mystery and the risk he is running by falling in love with her.

Similarly, when Jim and Catherine lie in bed, facing the end of their affair, the voice-over narrator says, "It was as if they were already dead" as the dangerous-love theme plays. This sequence associates death with their romance and foreshadows their fate at the film's end.

A similar sort of blending can be found in the film's final scene. Catherine and Jim have drowned, and Jules is overseeing the cremation of their bodies. As shots of the coffins dissolve into detailed shots of the cremation process, the enigma motif segues into its sinister variant, the menace motif. But as Jules leaves the cemetery and the narrator comments that Catherine had wanted her ashes to be cast to the winds, the string instruments glide into a sweeping version of the whirlwind waltz (7.37). The film's musical score concludes by recalling the three sides of Catherine that attracted the men to her: her mystery,

“So, given this mood-altering potential of music, it becomes a great source of fun, as well as a chance to make a scene that works OK work a whole lot better—to bring out the point of a scene that you haven't captured in the shooting of it, to excite the audience, to create the impression that something is happening when something isn't, and also to create little emotional touchstones which you can draw upon as the story changes—so that the music that seemed so innocent and sweet earlier, in new circumstances brings on a whole other set of feelings.”

—Jonathan Demme, director



7.37 Combining the motifs. The sadness of the ending is undercut by the lilting whirlwind waltz.

her menace, and her vivacious openness to experience. In such ways, a musical score can create, develop, and associate motifs that enter into the film's overall form.

Dimensions of Film Sound

We've seen what sounds consist of and how the filmmaker can select among the different kinds of sounds available. We've also seen how sound can guide the viewer's attention and create patterns across the film. But filmmakers have still more choices when they consider how to connect sounds to images.

First, sound unfolds over time, so it has a *rhythm*. Second, a sound can relate to its perceived source with greater or lesser *fidelity*. Third, sound suggests something about the *spatial* conditions in which it occurs. And fourth, the sound relates to visual events that take place at particular points in time, and this relationship gives sound a *temporal* dimension. These dimensions offer the filmmaker a great many areas of control and choice.

Rhythm

Rhythm works on us at deep levels. Our body maintains its own biorhythm, the most basic of which is the heartbeat. Psychologists have shown that music in a film triggers changes in heartbeat and other physical responses. Rhythmic audio stimuli can provoke visual attention, as when a chugging rhythm in the music prompts us to see that a train is approaching.

Rhythm involves, minimally, a *beat*, or pulse; a *tempo*, or pace; and a pattern of *accents*, or stronger and weaker beats. In the realm of sound, all of these features are naturally most recognizable in film music, since there beat, tempo, and accent are basic compositional features. In our examples from *Jules and Jim*, the motifs

can be characterized as having a $3/4$ metrical pulse, putting an accent on the first beat, and displaying variable tempo—sometimes slow, sometimes fast.

We can find rhythmic qualities in sound effects as well. The plodding hooves of a farm horse differ from a cavalry mount galloping at full speed. The reverberating tone of a gong may offer a slowly decaying accent, while a sudden sneeze provides a brief one. In a gangster film, a machine gun's fire creates a regular, rapid beat, while the sporadic reports of pistols may come at irregular intervals.

Speech also has rhythm. People can be identified by voice prints that show not only characteristic frequencies and amplitudes but also distinct patterns of pacing and syllabic stress. In *His Girl Friday*, our impression is of very rapid dialogue, but the scenes actually are rhythmically subtler than that. In the start of each scene, the pace is comparatively slow, but as the action develops, characters talk at a steadily accelerating rate. As the scene winds down, the conversational pace does as well. This rise-and-fall rhythm matches the arc of each scene, giving us a bit of a rest before launching the next comic complication.

Rhythm in Sound and Image: Coordination A filmmaker who wants to exploit sonic rhythm faces the fact that the movements in the images have a rhythm as well, distinguished by the same principles of beat, tempo, and accent. In addition, the editing has a rhythm. As we have seen, a succession of short shots helps create a rapid tempo, whereas shots held longer tend to slow down the pace.

In most cases, the rhythms of editing, of movement within the image, and of sound all cooperate. Possibly the most common tendency is for the filmmaker to match visual and sonic rhythms to each other. In a dance sequence in a musical, the figures move about at a rhythm determined by the music. But variation is always possible. In the “Waltz in Swing Time” number in *Swing Time*, the dancing of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers moves quickly in time to the music. Yet no fast cutting accompanies this scene. Indeed, the scene consists of a single long take from a long-shot distance.

Animated films often closely coordinate visible movement and sound. In Walt Disney films of the 1930s, the characters often move in exact synchronization with the music, even when they aren't dancing. (As we've seen, such exactness was possible because the sound track was recorded before the drawings were made.) Tightly matching movement to music came to be known as *Mickey-Mousing*.

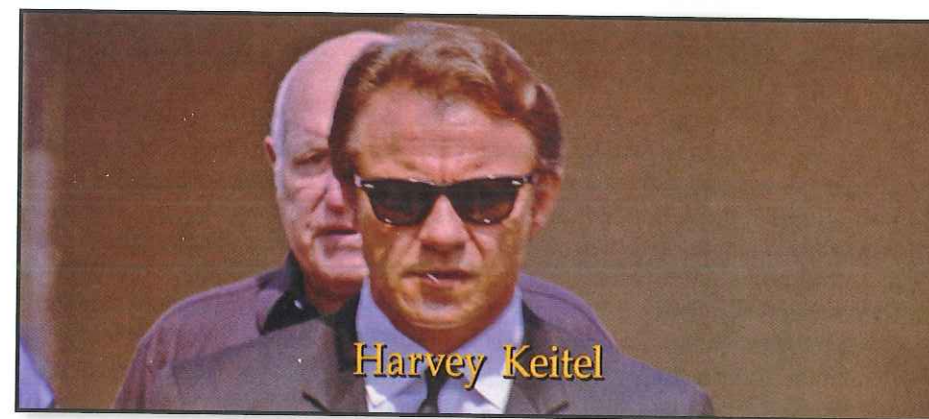
The credit sequence of Quentin Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs* shows how a director can coordinate the different rhythms of music, editing, and figure movement (7.38, 7.39). Although the gang of thieves is striding in slow motion, the music has a very fast tempo, close to 190 beats per minute. The editing rhythm is somewhat slower, as each cut comes at five-second intervals to match the phrase structure of the song. The rhythm of movement and gesture is even slower: The slow-motion image stretches out the characters' movements.

A tight correspondence between musical and visual rhythms can yield a powerful dramatic climax. Michael Mann's *The Last of the Mohicans* culminates in a chase and a fight along a mountain ridge. Alice has been captured by the renegade Magua, and Hawkeye, Uncas, and Chingachgook race up the trail to rescue her. We might expect, then, the standard thunderous action score, but what we hear is a quick, grave Scottish dance, initially played on fiddle, mandolin, and harpsichord. The tune was heard in an earlier dance scene at the fort, so it functions to recall the two couples' romances, but here it gives the scene a propulsive energy. Hand-to-hand struggles stand out against the throbbing music. Eventually, the theme swells to the full orchestra, but the same implacable beat governs the action. When Alice hovers on the cliff edge, about to jump off, somber chords repeat a seesaw pulse, as if time is standing still.

At the scene's climax, Chingachgook sprints into the fray, and faster musical figures played by stringed instruments recall the early dance tune. Chingachgook's attack on Magua consists of four precise blows from his battle-axe; each blow



7.38



7.39

7.38–7.39 Rhythmic contrast in *Reservoir Dogs*. As the credits start, the opening bass line of the George Baker Selection's “Little Green Bag” begins as well. When the drums join in, Tarantino cuts to a lateral tracking shot of the gang, many dressed in black suits, as they walk in slow motion (7.38). When the verse of the song starts, we cut to a medium shot of Mr. White. Harvey Keitel's credit is superimposed over this shot to link the actor and the character (7.39). Each of the principal cast members is introduced in a similar fashion, with each cut coordinated with the start of a new musical phrase.

coincides with the third beat in a series of musical measures. In the final moment of combat, the two warriors stand frozen opposite each other. The shot lasts three beats. On the fourth beat, Chingachgook launches the fatal blow. As Magua topples over, the music's pulse is replaced by a sustained string chord. *The Last of the Mohicans* synchronizes dance music with visual rhythms, but the result doesn't feel like Mickey-Mousing. The throbbing $4/4$ meter, the accented beats, and the leaping melody give the heroes' precise movements a choreographic grace.

Rhythm in Sound and Image: Disparities The filmmaker may also choose to create a disparity among the rhythms of sound, editing, and image. One of the most common options is to edit dialogue scenes in ways that cut against natural speech rhythms. In our example of dialogue overlap from *The Hunt for Red October* (7.20–7.22), the editing doesn't coincide with accented beats, cadences, or pauses in the officer's speech. Thus, the editing smooths over the changes of shot and emphasizes the words and facial expressions of Captain Ramius. If a filmmaker wants to emphasize the speaker and the speech, the cuts usually come at pauses or natural stopping points in the line, as in our example from *M* (7.23–7.26).

The filmmaker may contrast the rhythm of sound and picture in more noticeable ways. For instance, if the source of sound is primarily offscreen, the filmmaker can utilize the behavior of onscreen figures to create an expressive counterrhythm. Toward the end of John Ford's *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*, the aging cavalry captain, Nathan Brittles, watches his troops ride out of the fort just after he has retired. He regrets leaving the service and longs to go with the patrol. The sound of the scene consists of two elements: the cheerful title song sung by the departing riders, and the quick hoof beats of their horses. Yet only a few of the shots show the horses and singers, who ride at a rhythm matched to the sound. Instead, the scene



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We survey Lea Jacobs's theories about cinematic rhythm in “The getting of rhythm: Room at the bottom.”

concentrates our attention on Brittles, standing almost motionless by his horse. The contrast of brisk musical rhythm and the static images of the solitary Brittles expresses his regret at having to stay behind for the first time in many years.

Sometimes the musical accompaniment might even seem rhythmically inappropriate to the images. At intervals in *Four Nights of a Dreamer*, Robert Bresson presents shots of a large, floating nightclub cruising the Seine. The boat's movement is slow and smooth, yet the sound track consists of lively calypso music. (Not until a later scene do we discover that the music comes from a band aboard the boat.) The strange combination of fast sound tempo with the slow passage of the boat creates a languid, mysterious effect.

In Chris Marker's *La Jetée*, the contrast between image and sound rhythms dominates the entire film. *La Jetée* is made up almost entirely of still shots; except for one tiny gesture, all movement within the images is eliminated. Yet the film utilizes voice-over narration, music, and sound effects of a generally rapid, constantly accented rhythm. Despite the absence of movement, the film doesn't seem uncinematic, partly because it offers a dynamic interplay of audio-visual rhythms.

Most films don't follow just one strategy in combining the rhythms of pictures and sounds. A filmmaker may change rhythms in order to reset our expectations. In the famous battle on the ice in *Alexander Nevsky*, Sergei Eisenstein develops the sound from slow tempos to fast and back to slow. The first 12 shots of the scene show the Russian army anticipating the attack of the German knights. The shots are of moderate length, and they contain very little movement. The music is comparably slow, consisting of short, distinctly separated chords. Then, as the German army rides into sight over the horizon, both the visual movement and the tempo of the music increase quickly, and the battle begins. At the end of the battle, Eisenstein creates another contrast: A long passage of slow, lamenting music accompanies majestic tracking shots with little figure movement.

Fidelity

By *fidelity*, we don't mean the quality of recording. In our sense, fidelity refers to the extent to which the sound is faithful to the source as we conceive it. If a film shows us a barking dog and we hear a barking noise, that sound is faithful to its source; the sound maintains fidelity. But if the image of the barking dog is accompanied by the sound of a cat meowing, there enters a disparity between sound and image—a lack of fidelity.

From the filmmaker's standpoint, fidelity has nothing to do with what originally made the sound in production. Even if our dog emits a bark onscreen, perhaps in production the bark came from a different dog or was electronically synthesized. We do not know what light sabers really sound like, but we accept the whang they make in *Return of the Jedi* as plausible. (In production, their sound was made by hammering guy wires that anchored a radio tower.) You can make a dog meow as easily as making it bark. If the viewer takes the sound to be coming from its source in the diegetic world of the film, then it is faithful, regardless of its actual source in production. Fidelity is thus purely a matter of expectation.

When we're led to notice that a sound is unfaithful to its source, that awareness is usually used for comic effect, as with our meowing dog. In Jacques Tati's *Mr. Hulot's Holiday*, much humor arises from the opening and closing of a dining room door. Instead of recording a real door, Tati inserts a twanging sound like a plucked cello string each time the door swings. Aside from being amusing in itself, this sound functions to emphasize the rhythmic patterns created by waiters and diners passing through the door. Because many gags in Tati films are based on quirkily unrealistic noises, his films are good specimens for the study of fidelity.

Lack of fidelity yields both humor and subjectivity in Jerry Lewis's *The Nutty Professor* (1963). After a night of binge drinking, Professor Kelp returns to the classroom with a severe hangover. He's sensitive to every noise. When he closes the door,



7.40 Fun with fidelity. After several exaggerated noises indicating Kelp's hangover, drops in a test tube are heard as a reverberating snare drum played over fragmentary sounds of ocean waves.

it slams behind him with a hollow boom, sounding more like a metal drum. When he bumps into his desk and a book falls over, the noise echoes for several seconds and finishes with an electronic shimmering. There follows a string of closely miked, highly reverberated noises: the squeak of a chalk on the blackboard, the wet crackle of gum being chewed, and a blast from a student blowing her nose. The most flagrant manipulation of fidelity comes as drops from an eyedropper trickle into a test tube (7.40). Throughout, the comic manipulation of fidelity is motivated by Kelp's state of mind.

Still, not every play with fidelity is comic. In Alfred Hitchcock's *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, a landlady discovers a corpse in an apartment. We see her scream but hear a train whistle; then the scene shifts to action on a train. The whistle isn't faithful to its apparent source, but it provides a swift, vivid transition.

Space

Sound has a spatial dimension because it comes from a *source*. Our beliefs about that source have a powerful effect on how we understand the sound.

Diegetic Versus Nondiegetic Sound When we considered narrative form back in Chapter 3, we described events taking place in the story world as *diegetic* (p. 76). Accordingly, **diegetic sound** is sound that has a source in the story world. The words spoken by the characters, sounds made by objects in the story, and music represented as coming from instruments in the story space are all diegetic sound.

Diegetic sound is often hard to notice as such. It may seem to come naturally from the world of the film. But as we saw when the Ping-Pong game in *Mr. Hulot's Holiday* becomes abruptly quiet to allow us to hear action in the foreground, the filmmaker may manipulate diegetic sound in ways that aren't at all realistic.

Alternatively, there is **nondiegetic sound**, which is represented as coming from a source outside the story world. Music added to enhance the film's action is the most common type of nondiegetic sound. When Roger Thornhill is climbing Mount Rushmore in *North by Northwest* and tense music comes up, we don't expect to see an orchestra perched on the side of the mountain. Viewers understand that movie music is a convention and does not issue from the world of the story. The same holds true for the so-called omniscient narrator, the disembodied voice that gives us information but doesn't belong to any of the characters in the film. An example is *The Magnificent Ambersons*, in which the director, Orson Welles, speaks the nondiegetic narration.

“[Sound] doesn't have to be in-your-face, traditional, big sound effects. You can especially say a lot about the film with ambiances—the sounds for things you don't see. You can say a lot about where they are geographically, what time of day it is, what part of the city they're in, what kind of country they're in, the season it is. If you're going to choose a cricket, you can choose a cricket not for strictly geographic reasons. If there's a certain cricket that has a beat and a rhythm to it, it adds to the tension of a scene.”

—Gary Rydstrom, sound editor, *Toy Story*



7.41 Nondiegetic sound effects. As characters in *Le Million* toss the coat around, director René Clair fades in the sounds of a football game. Because the maneuvers of the chase do look like a scrimmage, this enhances the comedy of the sequence by creating a sort of audio-visual pun.

Nondiegetic sound effects are also possible. In *Le Million*, various characters pursue an old coat with a winning lottery ticket in the pocket. The chase converges backstage at the opera, where the characters race and dodge around one another, tossing the coat to their accomplices. What we hear, however, are the sounds of a football game, including a cheering crowd and a referee's whistle (7.41).

Nondiegetic sound effects have become common in contemporary Hollywood. Whooshing sounds are synchronized with rapid camera movements. In Tony Scott's remake of *The Taking of Pelham 123*, after the ransom has been gathered at the Brooklyn Federal Reserve, a nondiegetic whoosh accompanies a rapid zoom out to a satellite view showing the money's destination in midtown Manhattan. Similarly, nondiegetic "needle scratches," imitating a phonograph needle scraping across an LP record, are used for comic effect. Whooshes and needle scratches have become so common that online sound effects libraries offer them to aspiring filmmakers. A film's soundtrack can be completely nondiegetic. Bruce Conner's *A Movie*, Kenneth Anger's *Scorpio Rising*, and Derek Jarman's *War Requiem* use only nondiegetic music. Similarly, many compilation documentaries include no diegetic sound; instead, omniscient voice-over commentary and orchestral music guide our response to the images.

As with fidelity, the distinction between diegetic and nondiegetic sound reflects the conventions of film viewing. Viewers understand that certain sounds seem to come from the story world, while others come from outside the space of the story events. We've learned these conventions so thoroughly that we usually don't have to think about which type of sound we're hearing at any moment. At many times, though, a film's narration deliberately blurs boundaries between different spatial categories. A play with the conventions can be used to puzzle or surprise the audience, to create humor or ambiguity, or to suggest thematic implications. We'll give some examples shortly.

Resources of Diegetic Sound: Offscreen Sound We know that the space of the narrative action isn't limited to what we can see onscreen at any one moment. The same thing holds true for sound. In the last shot of our *The Hunt for Red October* scene, we hear the officer speaking while we see a shot of just Captain Ramius, listening (7.22). Early in the attack on the village in *The Seven Samurai*, we, along with the samurai, hear the hoof beats of the bandits' horses before we see a shot of them. These instances remind us that diegetic sound can be either *onscreen* or *offscreen*, depending on whether its source is inside the frame or outside the frame.

Offscreen sound is crucial to our experience of a film, and filmmakers know that it can save time and money. A shot may show only a couple sitting together in airplane seats, but if we hear a throbbing engine, other passengers chatting, and the creak of a beverage cart, we'll conjure up a plane in flight. Offscreen sound can create the illusion of a bigger space than we actually see, as in the cavernous prison sequences of *The Silence of the Lambs*. As with our creaking-door example (p. 265), offscreen sounds can shape our expectations of how a scene will develop (7.42–7.44).



7.42

7.42–7.44 Offscreen sound implies space. In *His Girl Friday*, Hildy goes into the pressroom to write her final story. As she chats with the other reporters, a loud clunk comes from an offscreen source, and they glance to the left (7.42). Hildy and another reporter walk to the window (7.43) and see a gallows being prepared for a hanging (7.44).



7.43



7.44



A CLOSER LOOK

Offscreen Sound and Optical Point of View

The Money Exchange in Jackie Brown

Optical point-of-view cutting can be very powerful, as we saw in examining *Rear Window* (p. 241). Now we're in a position to see—and hear—how it can be coordinated with onscreen and offscreen sound. Quentin Tarantino's *Jackie Brown* offers an illuminating example because, like our sequence from *Letter from Siberia* (pp. 265–266), it runs the same sequence of actions three times, with varying sound tracks. Unlike Chris Marker's film, however, *Jackie Brown* presents the scene as different characters experience it.

Jackie is supposed to deliver over half a million dollars in cash to the dangerous arms dealer Ordell. Ordell has sent his girlfriend, Melanie, and his partner, Louis, to pick up the money from a fitting room in a dress shop. Jackie, however, is playing her own game. She's agreed to help federal agents arrest Ordell, but she has also recruited the bail bondsman Max Cherry to help her switch shopping bags and leave Ordell empty-handed.

This story action is presented three times in the plot, each time adding a layer to our understanding of what's really happening. It would be worthwhile to study the careful auditory touches in these three sequences, such as the replay of the shop's Muzak and the delicate Foley work on footsteps, fabric, and other noises. Here we'll concentrate on optical subjectivity and offscreen sound, because these techniques are crucial in making the triple play clear to the audience. They also serve to contrast Ordell's squabbling, inept partners and the self-possessed Jackie and Max.

The first run-through confines us to Jackie's range of knowledge. She tries on a pantsuit, and the saleswoman says, "Wow, you look really cool!" (7.45). Jackie goes

back to the fitting rooms and waits for Melanie. We hear Melanie arrive offscreen, and Tarantino shows us her shoes from Jackie's viewpoint. After Melanie has left, Jackie repacks the money in a shopping bag she leaves in the cubicle and hurries out. She hastily pays the sales clerk, who calls after her, "Wait, your change!" and waves her bills (7.46). Jackie rushes out to the mall and summons the federal agents, shouting that Melanie stole the bag from her.

Tarantino flashes back to an earlier phase of the action, with Louis and Melanie arriving at the shop. As the camera follows them (7.47, 7.48), we hear the saleswoman say from offscreen, "Wow, you look really cool!" The camera pans to Jackie and the clerk (7.49). The offscreen sound has motivated showing this dialogue again, and its unnatural loudness assures that we understand that we're entering the scene at a point we've already witnessed. Louis and Melanie try to look inconspicuous. When Melanie teases Louis about his nervousness, he angrily twists her arm, and she blurts out, "Hey, would you let go!" (7.50).

Tarantino now uses offscreen sound to test Louis's dull wits. Louis looks down at the shirts he's riffling through (7.51), and we hear an offscreen phone ring. Louis doesn't look up, but we are given a shot of the clerk answering (7.52). What does get Louis's attention is Melanie, who abruptly departs for the fitting rooms. Looking uneasily this way and that, Louis sees Max, whom he dimly recognizes, and the two men exchange glances in shot/reverse shot. Then Melanie hustles out of the fitting rooms, and Louis catches up with her. They leave quarreling about who should carry the bag.



7.45 The sales clerk tells Jackie, "Wow, you look really cool!"

7.45–7.46 *Jackie Brown*: The first run-through



7.46 After Jackie has left the money in the fitting room, she hurries away, pretending to be distraught. The clerk calls after her, "Wait, your change!"



A CLOSER LOOK

Continued



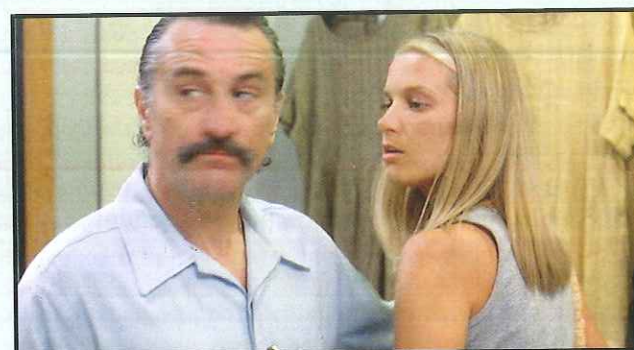
7.47 As Melanie and Louis head toward the shop, the camera tracks rightward with them, passing Max Cherry in the foreground.



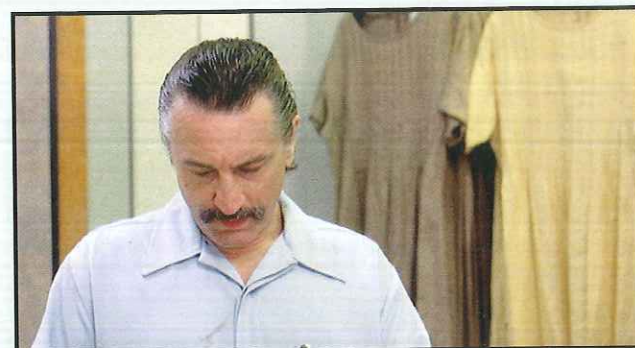
7.48 As Melanie and Louis approach, we hear, "Wow, you look really cool!" fairly softly.



7.49 The camera pans to pick up Jackie and the clerk, as Jackie says she'll buy the outfit. Sound perspective makes the dialogue louder and clearer, emphasizing that this is a repetition of the scene we've just witnessed. (Compare 7.45.)



7.50 Quarreling at the garment racks, Louis grabs Melanie's arm and she snaps, "Hey, would you let go!"



7.51 Louis browses through shirts. At the end of the shot, a telephone rings offscreen.

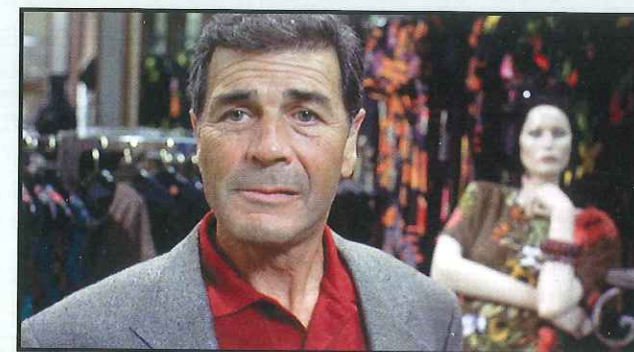
7.47–7.52 The second version



7.52 The clerk answers the phone, but this isn't Louis's point of view; it's close to what he might have seen if he *had* looked up.

The scene runs a third time, now attaching us to Max's range of knowledge. The second version hinted at his presence early, when the tracking shot following Melanie and Louis glided past him in the foreground (7.47, 7.48). We see him enter and browse, waiting calmly for the scam to begin. Once more Jackie comes out wearing the outfit, and the sales clerk says, "Wow, you look really cool!" But now the exchange is observed from Max's point of view (**7.53, 7.54**). The sound track fades out the dialogue between the clerk and Jackie and fades up the quarrel between Melanie and Louis. Max turns his attention to them and then back to Jackie and the clerk. Here the sound mixing is quite subjective, conveying Max's shifting attention between the two conversations.

While Max is watching the action at the counter, we hear Louis and Melanie quarreling, and this motivates another switch in Max's attention, in time for him to observe her exclaiming, "Hey, would you let go!" (**7.55, 7.56**). The ringing phone drives his eyes back to the clerk (**7.57, 7.58**), but he keeps Melanie in mind too. A



7.53 Pretending to be killing time in the shop, Max turns his attention to Jackie . . .



7.54 . . . just as the clerk exclaims, "Wow, you look really cool!" The repeated line anchors us in action we remember. The framing from Max's optical point of view varies what we saw in 7.45 and 7.49.



7.55 After Jackie leaves for the changing room, Max shifts his attention to Melanie and Louis, in time to hear her say, "Hey, would you let go!"

little before Louis notices, Max sees Melanie set off on her mission. Louis clumsily scans the shop, but Max is calm and purposeful. Each offscreen sound snaps his attention to what is crucial to the plan. After Melanie and Louis leave, it's through Max's eyes that we see Jackie's departure, with the shop woman calling, "Wait, your change!" (**7.59**). Max pauses, then heads for the fitting room to retrieve the shopping bag and the fortune.

By repeating key actions, noises, and lines of dialogue, the replays lay out the mechanics of the exchange cogently. The variations between the second and third sequences allow Tarantino to characterize the thieves. Max is more alert than Louis and Melanie, and offscreen sounds prompt him to shift his attention precisely. Moreover, each version of story events is nested neatly inside the next one: Jackie and the clerk, then Jackie and the clerk watched by Melanie and Louis, then all the others watched by Max, who completes the money exchange. Sound and image work together to peel back each layer and expand our appreciation of Jackie's intricate double-cross.



A CLOSER LOOK

Continued



7.56 His switch in attention is conveyed through a point-of-view shot. Compare 7.50.



7.57 Max has been studying the couple, but the sound of a ringing phone offscreen makes him shift his glance. Unlike Louis, he notices.



7.58 The clerk answers the phone. (Compare 7.52.) This diversion impels Melanie to seize the moment and stride into the changing room, watched by Max and, eventually, Louis.

7.53–7.59 The third run-through



7.59 After the bogus switch has been made, Jackie comes out and hurries to the counter. Max watches the transaction, and from his point of view we see Jackie rush off, with the clerk calling after, "Wait, your change!" (Compare 7.46.) Now Max walks to the counter. His approach will be presented, in keeping with the rest of the sequence, as his optical point-of-view.

Offscreen sound can fill in information very economically. In *Zodiac*, we see the alcoholic reporter Avery wake up after sleeping in his car. As he abruptly sits up, we hear the clink of bottles on the floor. The sound confirms our suspicion that he has spent another night drinking.

Used with optical point-of-view shots, offscreen sound can create restricted narration, guiding us toward what a character is noticing. In *No Country for Old Men*, Llewelyn Moss is holed up in a hotel room with a bag of cash, hiding from his implacable pursuer Anton Chigurh. When he realizes that a tracking device has been hidden among the bills, the narration is limited solely to what Moss sees and hears. He tries calling the downstairs desk. We dimly hear the distant phone ringing unanswered, so like him we infer that Chigurh has killed the clerk.

The sonic texture is very detailed, highlighting the slight noises of Moss shifting on the bed and switching off the lamp. Then, against a muted background of wind, we hear steadily approaching footsteps in the hall, accompanied by rapid pinging on a homing device. Moss's optical point-of-view confirms Chigurh's

arrival: We see the shadows of his feet in the crack under the door. Moss cocks his shotgun, creating a click that seems abnormally loud and close. The shadows move away, and we hear the slight creaking of a light bulb being unscrewed in the hall, eliminating the streak of illumination under the door. The auditory climax of the scene is the metallic burst of the door lock rocketing into the room. *No Country*'s narration has created suspense by restricting both vision and sound to Moss's range of knowledge. For another instance of sound controlled by narration, see "A Closer Look."

Resources of Diegetic Sound: Subjectivity Diegetic sound harbors other possibilities. It can give us perceptual subjectivity, in a way parallel to an optical POV shot (p. 241). In *The King's Speech*, a therapist treats a man with a bad stammer. He directs the patient to read a text into a microphone while listening to music on headphones (7.60). But we hear only the music that the patient hears. The therapist says the reading went well, while the patient believes he did badly. Who's right? We can't know until a later scene, when the patient's recorded reading is presented. The sound track here creates a restricted range of knowledge, building up suspense until we hear the recording.

Just as dreams, memories, and fantasies can be shown on the image track, mental subjectivity (p. 91) can be presented on the sound track too. We may hear a character's thoughts even though the character's lips don't move; presumably, other characters cannot hear these thoughts. Here the narration uses sound to achieve subjectivity, giving us information about the mental state of the character. Such spoken thoughts are comparable to mental images on the visual track. A character may also remember words, snatches of music, or events as represented by sound effects. In this case, the technique is comparable to a visual flashback.

Again, we can set out some of the choices a filmmaker faces. Does the sound have a physical source in the scene? It's diegetic, so let's call this **external diegetic sound**. Does the sound come from inside the mind of the character? That is also diegetic, but rather **internal diegetic sound**. Our example of the dripping sound during the Nutty Professor's hangover is an example. More explicitly, Laurence Olivier's version of *Hamlet* presents Hamlet's famous soliloquies as inner monologues. Hamlet is the source of the thoughts we hear represented as speech, but the words are only in his mind, not in his objective surroundings. Gus Van Sant employs a similar tactic in *Paranoid Park*. A teenage boy fleeing from a horrific accident is plagued by inner voices, some of them auditory flashbacks. By having snatches of dialogue burst in from different stereo channels and with different degrees of clarity, Van Sant presents the boy as engulfed by confusion about what to do next.

A filmmaker may cross the internal/external border for expressive purposes. *The Snake Pit* begins with close views of Virginia on a bench. We hear voices questioning her, and she makes replies, looking left and right (7.61). We also hear Virginia's inner monologue wondering why people keep asking these things. We might take the voices to be offscreen, particularly since their sound quality differs from the texture of her thoughts. Eventually, though, the camera pulls back to reveal that no one is around her. Everything except her spoken replies has been internal. But the filmmakers have subtly adjusted the timbre and volume of the questions to distinguish them from her thoughts. This choice suggests that they are real to Virginia—a woman institutionalized with hallucinations.



7.60 In this shot from *The King's Speech*, we don't see the patient's optical POV. In fact, we are viewing him from the opposite side of the microphone. We expect to hear his voice as he reads. The only sound, however, is subjective—the music coming through the headphones. We hear what the patient does, and only the therapist hears the voice reading.



7.61 Internal or external? In *The Snake Pit*, Virginia replies to one of her questioners. Differences in timbre and volume differentiate her speech from two layers of internal sound: her private thoughts and her hallucinations of people's voices questioning her.

Multiple-channel theater sound has reshaped the conventions of internal diegetic sound even more. *The Iron Lady* presents an aged Margaret Thatcher hallucinating that her dead husband is still alive and talking with her. Some scenes present close framings on her face, as in *The Snake Pit*, with the husband's voice offscreen. We might expect that his subjective dialogue should come from the center channel, where Mrs. Thatcher's head is. But in those moments, director Phyllida Lloyd chooses to let his voice issue only from the left or right channel. By suggesting that he hovers just outside the frame, the sound captures Mrs. Thatcher's sense that he solidly exists in offscreen space.

More drastically, in today's films an inner monologue may not be signaled by close shots of a character who's thinking, as in *Hamlet* and *The Snake Pit*. Wong Kar-wai and Terrence Malick will sometimes inject a character's voiced thoughts into scenes in which the character isn't prominent, or even visible. When the voice of a paid killer reflects on his job in Wong's *Fallen Angels*, we see distant shots of him mixed with several shots of the woman who arranges his contracts. In Malick's *The Thin Red Line* and *The New World*, characters are heard musing during lengthy montage sequences in which they don't even appear. These floating monologues come to resemble a more traditional voice-over narration. This impression is reinforced when the inner monologue uses the past tense, as if the action we're seeing onscreen is being recalled from a later time.

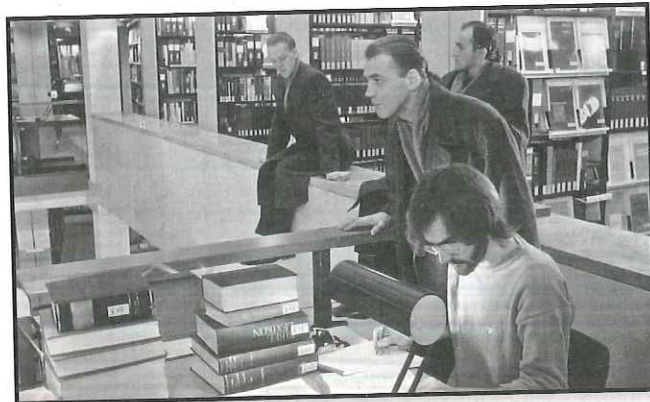
A different sort of internal diegetic sound occurs in Wim Wenders's *Wings of Desire*. Dozens of people are reading in a large public library (7.62). Incidentally, this sequence also constitutes an interesting exception to the general rule that one character cannot hear another's internal diegetic sound. The film's premise is that Berlin is patrolled by invisible angels who *can* tune in to humans' thoughts. This is a good example of how the conventions of a genre (here, the fantasy film) and the film's specific narrative context can modify a traditional device.

To summarize: Sound may be diegetic (in the story world) or nondiegetic (outside the story world). If it's diegetic, it may be internal (subjective) or external (objective). If it's external, it may be onscreen or offscreen.

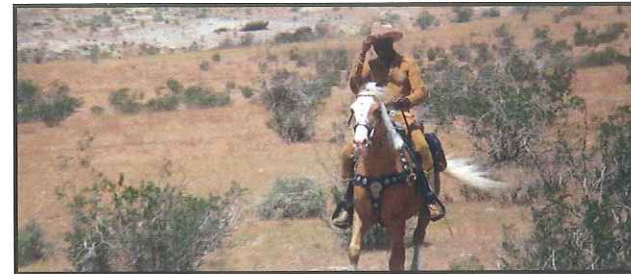
Playing with the Diegetic/Nondiegetic Distinction In most sequences, the sources of the sounds are clearly diegetic or nondiegetic. But some films blur the distinction. Since we're used to identifying a sound's source easily, a film may try to cheat our expectations.

In Mel Brooks's *Blazing Saddles*, we hear what we think is nondiegetic musical accompaniment for a cowboy's ride across the prairie—until he rides past Count Basie and his orchestra (7.63, 7.64). This joke depends on a reversal of our expectations about the convention of nondiegetic music. A more elaborate example is the 1986 musical version of *Little Shop of Horrors*. There a trio of female singers strolls through many scenes, providing musical commentary on the action without any of the characters noticing them. To complicate matters, the three singers also appear in minor diegetic roles, and then they do interact with the main characters.

In one scene of John Ford's *Stagecoach*, a diegetic sound slowly emerges out of a nondiegetic score. The stagecoach is desperately fleeing from a band of Indians. The ammunition is running out, and all seems lost until a troop of cavalry suddenly arrives. But instead of showing the cavalry riding to the rescue, the film's narration confines us to what happens inside the coach. First,



7.62 Angels overhearing. As the camera tracks past the readers in *Wings of Desire*, we hear their thoughts as a throbbing murmur of many voices in many languages.



7.63



7.64

7.63–7.64 Nondiegetic sound becomes diegetic: Comedy. The hero of *Blazing Saddles* rides jauntily through the desert accompanied by apparently nondiegetic music (7.63) until he passes Count Basie's orchestra, which makes the music (implausibly) diegetic (7.64).

offscreen sound shows one passenger killed, but then a bugle call signals that the coach is being rescued (7.65–7.69).

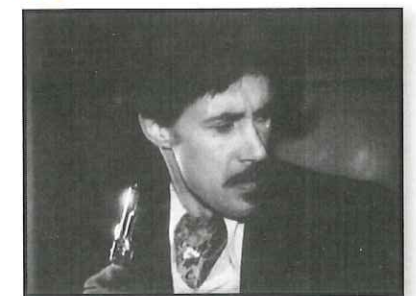
More complicated is a moment in *The Magnificent Ambersons* when Orson Welles creates an unusual interplay between the diegetic and nondiegetic sounds. A prologue to the film outlines the background of the Amberson family and the birth of the son, George. A nondiegetic narrator, who isn't a character in the story, explains the Amberson family history. At one point, a woman replies to the narrator's comment (7.70–7.72). Welles playfully departs from conventional usage to emphasize the arrival of the story's main character and the hostility of the townspeople to him.

This passage from *The Magnificent Ambersons* juxtaposes diegetic and nondiegetic sounds in a disconcerting way. In other films, a single sound may be ambiguous because it could fall into either category. In *Vicki Cristina Barcelona* (2008), Vicki becomes quite moved by a Spanish guitar performance to which Juan Antonio takes her. This same music returns in the next scene when Juan Antonio seduces Vicki and later when they bump into each other at a social gathering. The recurring guitar music might be taken as nondiegetic, a recurring musical motif like "Moon River" in *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. But since it isn't changed in rhythm or instrumentation, it might represent the characters' shared memory of the performance.

Similarly, at a major point in Paul Thomas Anderson's *Magnolia*, several characters are shown in different locations, each singing softly along to the Aimee Mann



7.65



7.66



7.67



7.68



7.69

7.65–7.69 Nondiegetic sound becomes diegetic: Drama. In *Stagecoach*, Ford shows a medium close-up of one of the passengers, Hatfield, who has just discovered that he is down to his last bullet (7.65). He glances off right and raises his pistol (7.66). The camera pans right to Lucy, praying. During all this, orchestral music, including bugles, plays nondiegetically. Unseen by Lucy, the gun comes into the frame from the left as Hatfield prepares to shoot her to prevent her from being captured by the Indians (7.67). But before he shoots, an offscreen gunshot is heard, and Hatfield's hand and gun drop down out of the frame (7.68). Then bugle music becomes somewhat more prominent. Lucy's expression changes as she says, "Can you hear it? Can you hear it? It's a bugle. They're blowing the charge" (7.69). Only then does Ford cut to the cavalry itself racing toward the coach.



7.70

7.70–7.72 A character replies to the narrator. We see a group of townswomen gossiping about the marriage of Isabel Amberson, and one predicts that she will have “the worst spoiled lot of children this town will ever see” (7.70). The nondiegetic narrator resumes his description of the family history: “The prophetess proved to be mistaken in a single detail merely; Wilbur and Isabel did not have *children*. They had only one.” But at this point, over the shot of the street, we hear the gossip’s voice again: “Only one! But I’d like to know if he isn’t spoiled enough for a whole carload” (7.71). The narrator goes on, “Again, she found none to challenge her. George Amberson Minafer, the Major’s one grandchild, was a princely terror.” While they’re talking, a pony cart comes up the street, and we see George for the first time (7.72). In this exchange, the woman seems to reply to the narrator, even though we must assume that she can’t hear what he says. (After all, she’s a character in the story and he isn’t.)



7.71



7.72

song “Wise Up.” When the sequence begins in Claudia’s apartment, the song might be taken as diegetic and offscreen, since she has been listening to Aimee Mann tunes in an earlier scene. But then Anderson cuts to other characters elsewhere singing along, even though they cannot be hearing the music in Claudia’s apartment. It would seem that the sound is now nondiegetic, with the characters accompanying it as they might do in a musical. The sequence underlines the parallels among several suffering characters and conveys an eerie sense of disparate people for once on the same emotional wavelength. The sound also works with the crosscutting to pull the characters together before the climax, when many will meet face to face.

A more disturbing uncertainty about whether a sound is diegetic often crops up in the films of Jean-Luc Godard. He narrates some of his films in nondiegetic voice-over, but in other films, such as *2 or 3 Things I Know About Her*, he seems also to be in the story space, whispering questions or comments whose sound perspective makes them seem close to the camera. Godard does not claim to be a character in the action, yet the characters onscreen sometimes behave as though they hear him. This uncertainty as to diegetic or nondiegetic sound sources enables Godard to stress the conventionality of traditional sound usage.

Sound Perspective

Throughout this chapter we’ve referred to sound perspective—the way a film suggests the placement of the sound in the story world. Sound perspective operates in a way similar to the cues for depth that we get with visual perspective.

Our earlier examples have shown that sound perspective is often indicated by volume. Volume varied with distance in the canyon scene of *127 Hours* (p. 269), and increasing loudness signaled the approach of the bandits in *The Seven Samurai* (pp. 276–277). Timbre helps create sound perspective too. If you combine directly recorded sounds with sounds reflected from the environment, you’ll create reverberations suggesting a particular distance. Timbre is most evident with echoes. In *The Magnificent Ambersons*, the conversations that take place on the baroque staircase have a distinct echo, giving the impression of huge, empty spaces around the characters. A small room wouldn’t yield the same timbre.

Sound perspective is important in cinematic narration because it can ease us from one point of view to another, as we saw in the *Jackie Brown* example (pp. 287–290). A similar shift occurs in Robert Altman’s *Gosford Park*. A music-hall star performs a song for guests at a country estate. At the start, the sound

perspective places us in the drawing room, where guests gossip and play bridge. When Altman cuts to two servants listening in another room, the song’s softer volume and a touch of reverberation indicate greater distance from the performance.

Point of View and Expressiveness As the camera follows a character, the filmmaker may use changes in sound perspective to suggest the character’s movement through space, a sort of sonic point of view. But many uses of sound perspective don’t try to be realistic. In a long shot, a character’s voice will usually be clearer than if we were the same distance from her or him in reality, and when we cut to a close-up, that character’s voice will not be significantly louder or crisper. In a conversation with sound overlaps, like the one in *The Hunt for Red October* (pp. 273–274), the speaker’s voice doesn’t change perspective when the camera shifts to show the listener.

In our hypothetical example presenting Jim and Amanda talking on the phone, one option would involve sound perspective. If we stayed with Jim and only heard Amanda’s replies, her voice would be given a different perspective. Generally, when the person on camera is speaking, the lines are clear and enhanced by natural ambient sounds. A voice heard over the receiver is usually more coarsely rendered and more reverberant, carrying lower pitches and providing little ambient sound. Sound editors call this disparity the *telephone split*. It represents the fact that the listener is hearing a voice on the line, but it seldom matches what a phone call sounds like in reality.

Like all conventions, the telephone split can be adjusted for expressive possibilities. In *Phone Booth*, a publicist is trapped in a booth, pinned down by an unseen sniper who keeps him talking on the phone. Here the telephone split takes an unusual form. The publicist is heard normally, with ambient sound, but we don’t hear the sniper as a crackling telephone voice. Instead, we hear soft, closely miked speech in a dry sound envelope. It does not change when the camera moves toward or away from the booth. The voice has a slight electronic twang, so it doesn’t sound as neutral as a narrator’s voice-over, but it remains closer to our perspective than to the protagonist’s. Whispering, laughing, making rude remarks about what’s happening around the booth, the sniper’s voice hovers in a realm somewhere between us and the street. It enhances the sense that the protagonist is being watched by a distant, somewhat ghostly threat.

Sound Perspective in the Theater Space In daily life, a sound reaches one ear a few thousandths of a second before it reaches the other. Slight as the difference is, the proportion of direct and reflected sound gives us information about where the source is. Thanks to multichannel playback, modern theater design can mimic these disparities with great accuracy.

In the typical Dolby 5.1 setup (p. 45), the three speakers behind the screen transmit most dialogue, effects, and music. These channels can suggest regions of sound within the frame, as in *Lawrence of Arabia* when airplanes bombing a camp swoop overhead and the rumble of their engines slides from channel to channel. The front channels can evoke space offscreen as well. In farcical comedies such as *The Naked Gun*, left or right channels can suggest collisions and falls just outside the frame. During the climactic scene of *The Fugitive*, Richard Kimble is sneaking up on the friend who has betrayed him, and he reaches down past the lower frame line. As he slides his arm to the right, a rolling clank in the center channel tells us that there is an iron pipe at his feet.

With use of surround channels, a remarkably immersive sound environment can be created in the theater. The *Star Wars* series uses multiple-channel sound to suggest space vehicles whizzing all around the audience. As one sound designer puts it, surround effects allow the filmmaker to “hang” noises in the auditorium much as an interior designer might hang draperies on a wall. We’ve mentioned one example of the process in a scene from *Brave* (p. 45).



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We consider how minutely filmmakers can adjust the telephone split in “Little things mean a lot: Micro-stylistics.”

“She first hears the music at a bit of a distance, coming from the house, and as she walks in—the music is getting closer, step-by-step—she goes from the entrance way up the stairs—the music is still growing—and she finally passes by a guitarist on the stairs.”

—Tony Volante, re-recording mixer,
Rachel Getting Married

“I like to think that I not only record a sound but the space between me and the sound: The subject that generates the sound is merely what causes the surrounding space to resonate.”

—Walter Murch, sound designer,
American Graffiti and *Apocalypse Now*

“At the climax when the two snipers see each in their scopes, we focused on water drips only. The German’s drip was a drum-like rhythm on the window where he’s hiding, and then the metallic drip where the American is hiding. We cut to that drip, then that drip, in this case following the visuals. You don’t always have to, because you can choose what you hear. Think like a director or DP, staging a scene with equivalent techniques like depth of field, and choose what the audience’s ears are focused on.”

—Gary Rydstrom on shifting aural perspective in *Saving Private Ryan*

Like other techniques, sound localization in the theater needn’t be used for realistic purposes. Most dialogue is placed in the center channel speakers, but as we’ve seen, *Paranoid Park* and *The Iron Lady* spread imaginary conversations to subsidiary channels (pp. 291, 292). In Terry Gilliam’s *12 Monkeys*, James Cole is a convict volunteer sent from the future to discover the cause of a viral outbreak. The dialogue of onscreen characters comes from the front channels, but when the doctors from the future attempt to communicate with Cole, we hear their voices coming from every channel around the audience. Their disembodied quality evokes Cole’s sound perspective and raises the possibility that he may be a delusional schizophrenic who “hears voices” and imagines being part of a future world.

Time

Sound also permits the filmmaker to represent time in various ways. Just as the sources we hear need not be in the space we see, the time represented on the sound track need not coincide with the time that the image presents. To capture all the choices the filmmaker faces, we’ll need to make some distinctions that require a little patience.

Most often, the filmmaker decides to hear the sound at the same time as we see what makes it. Characters move their lips, and we hear the appropriate words. A gun fires and we hear a blast. These are instances of **synchronous sound**.

When the sound does go out of synchronization, through a mechanical error, the result is quite distracting. Would a filmmaker ever want to put such **asynchronous**, or out-of-sync, **sound** into the film itself? Yes, sometimes. It can spoof poorly dubbed films in other languages. *Wayne’s World 2* features asynchronous sound in a fight scene between Wayne and his girlfriend’s father, Mr. Wong.

More systematically, *Singin’ in the Rain* creates gags based on asynchronous sound. In the early days of sound filming, a pair of silent screen actors have just made their first talking picture, *The Dueling Cavalier*. Their film company previews the film for an audience, but the technology fails and the picture gets out of synchronization. All the sounds come several seconds before their sources are seen in the image. A line of dialogue begins and *then* the actor’s lips move. A woman’s voice is heard when a man moves his lips, and vice versa. The humor of this disastrous preview in *Singin’ in the Rain* depends on our realization that a film’s synchronization of sound and image is simply a mechanical illusion.

A lengthier play with our expectations about synchronization comes in Woody Allen’s *What’s Up Tiger Lily?* Allen dubbed a new sound track on an Asian spy film, but the English-language dialogue isn’t a translation of the original. Instead, it creates a new story. The movie’s one-liners and non sequiturs are enhanced by our constant awareness that the words are barely synchronized with the actors’ lips. Allen has turned the usual problems of the dubbing of foreign films into the basis of his comedy.

Matters of synchronization are fairly easy to spot. They relate to screen duration, or *viewing* time. As we saw in Chapter 3, though, narrative films can also present *story* and *plot* time. Story time consists of the order, duration, and frequency of all the events pertinent to the narrative, whether they are shown to us or not. Plot time consists of the order, duration, and frequency of the events actually represented in the film. Plot time shows us selected story events but skips over others.

Filmmakers have realized that sound can manipulate story and plot time in two basic ways. Does the sound take place at the same time as the image, in terms of the story events? If so, we can call it **simultaneous sound**. This is overwhelmingly the most common usage. We see and hear two characters speaking, or we see a truck driving down the street and hear the truck’s sounds. The plot isn’t manipulating the order of sound events.

But filmmakers also realize that the sound we hear can occur earlier or later in the story than the events we see in the image. This manipulation of story order

involves **nonsimultaneous sound**. The most common example of this is the sonic flashback. For instance, we might see characters chatting in the present but hear another character’s voice from an earlier scene. Or, instead of hearing the truck’s engine, we hear gunshots from an earlier scene. By means of nonsimultaneous sound, the film can present earlier story events without showing them.

So filmmakers have a wide range of options about sound and story time. To help to distinguish them, Table 7.2 sums up the possible temporal and spatial relationships that image and sound can display.

Diegetic Sound The first and third of these possibilities are rare, so let’s start with the second and most common option:

1. *Sound simultaneous in story with image.* As we just mentioned, this is by far the most common temporal relation that sound displays in fiction films. Noise, music, or speech that comes from the space of the story almost invariably occurs at the same time as the image.

Like any other sort of diegetic sound, simultaneous sound can be either external (objective) or internal (subjective). So instead of a character speaking, we might hear an inner monologue, with the character talking to oneself. But that monologue is still presumably simultaneous with the image onscreen.

2. *Sound earlier in story than image.* Here the sound comes from an earlier point in the story than the action we’re seeing onscreen. A sonic flashback is one example.

Usually sonic flashbacks are subjective, representing character memory. Recalling Obi-wan Kenobi’s words, Luke Skywalker decides to trust the Force and turn off his ship’s targeting computer. Many contemporary films use these mental “replays.”

On rare occasions, the sonic flashback isn’t subjective. Sound from earlier in the story action may simply be laid over the current scene for emphasis. Joseph Losey’s *Accident* opens with sound indicating an offscreen car crash (7.73). The plot goes on to present a long flashback tracing what led up to the accident. Back in the present, the film ends with a parallel image, accompanied by the noise of the fatal crash (7.74). There isn’t another crash taking place nearby, and there’s no evidence that the professor is remembering the original



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Today’s films often replay scenes in order to give us new story information, but sometimes a film does this just on the auditory level. We look at two examples of sound from the story past rerun in the present in “Play it again, Joan.”

TABLE 7.2 Temporal Relations of Sound in Cinema

Time	Space of Source	
	Diegetic (Story Space)	Nondiegetic (Nonstory Space)
1. Nonsimultaneous; sound from <i>earlier</i> in story than image	Sound flashback; image flashforward with sound continuing in present; sound bridge	Sound marked as past put over images (e.g., sound of John Kennedy speech put over images of United States today)
2. Sound simultaneous in story with image	<i>External:</i> dialogue, effects, music <i>Internal:</i> thoughts of character heard	Sound marked as simultaneous with images put over images (e.g., narrator describing events in present tense)
3. Nonsimultaneous; sound from <i>later</i> in story than image	Sound of flashforward; image flashback with sound continuing in present; character narrates earlier events; sound bridge	Sound marked as later put over images (e.g., reminiscing narrator of <i>The Magnificent Ambersons</i>)

7.73–7.74 Sound from earlier in the story. *Accident* begins on a long shot of a house and driveway at night. As the camera tracks forward, offscreen traffic noises give way to the sound of screeching tires and a crash. We see a figure, later to be identified as an Oxford professor, come to the doorway (7.73) and hurry to the crash site. At the end of the film, we see a similar image of the home in daylight, after the main action of the plot has concluded. As the camera tracks back, the professor and his sons go into the house (7.74). Offscreen traffic sounds increase in volume, and again we hear the initial crash.



7.73



7.74



7.75



7.76

7.75–7.76 A sound bridge between scenes. One scene of *The Silence of the Lambs* ends with Clarice Starling on the telephone, as she mentions a location called the “Your Self Storage facility . . .” (7.75). Her voice continues, “. . . right outside central Baltimore” over the first shot of the next scene, the sign for the Your Self warehouse (7.76).

incident. Instead, an unrestricted narration inserts this auditory flashback. Along with the repeated camera position, the sound reminds us of the opening situation and may imply that the tragedy will haunt the family’s life.

Sound may belong to an earlier time than the image in another way. The sound from the previous scene may linger briefly while the image is already presenting the next scene. This common device is called a **sound bridge**. Sound bridges of this sort may create smooth transitions by setting up expectations that are quickly confirmed (7.75, 7.76).

Sound bridges can sometimes make our expectations more uncertain. In Tim Hunter’s *The River’s Edge*, three high school boys are standing outside school, and one of them confesses to having killed his girlfriend. When his pals scoff, he says, “They don’t believe me.” There is a cut to the dead girl lying in the grass by the river, while on the sound track we hear one of his friends call it a crazy story that no one will believe. There’s a brief uncertainty. Is a new scene starting, with the friend’s response an offscreen one? Or are we seeing a cutaway to the corpse, which could be followed by a shot returning to the three boys at school? The shot dwells on the dead girl,

and after a pause, we hear, with a different sound ambience, “If you brought us . . .” Then there is a cut to a shot of the three youths walking through the woods to the river, as the same character continues, “. . . all the way out here for nothing. . .” The friend’s remark about the crazy story belongs to an earlier, somewhat indeterminate time than the shot of the corpse, and it becomes an unsettling sound bridge to the new scene.

3. *Sound later in story than image.* Sound may also occur at a time later than that depicted by the images. Here we usually tend to take the images as occurring in the past and the sound as occurring in the present or future.

A simple prototype occurs in many trial dramas. The testimony of a witness in the present is heard on the sound track, while the image presents a flashback to an earlier event. The same effect occurs when the film employs a reminiscing narrator, as in John Ford’s *How Green Was My Valley*. Aside from a glimpse at the beginning, we don’t see the protagonist Huw as a man, only as a boy, but his grown-up voice-over accompanies the bulk of the plot, which is set in the distant past. Huw’s present-time voice on the sound track creates a strong sense of nostalgia for the past and constantly reminds us of the pathetic decline that the characters will eventually suffer.

Since the late 1960s, it has become somewhat common for the sound from the next scene to begin while the images of the last one are still on the screen. Like the instances in which the next scene begins when we’re hearing sound from the previous one, this transitional device is called a *sound bridge*. In Wim Wenders’s *American Friend*, a nighttime shot of a little boy riding in the back seat of a car is accompanied by a harsh clacking. There is a cut to a railroad station, where the timetable board flips through its metal cards listing times and destinations. Since the sound over the shot of the boy comes from the later scene, this portion is nonsimultaneous.

In principle, one could also have a sound *flashforward*. The filmmaker could, say, use the sounds that belong with scene 5 to accompany the images in scene 2. In practice, such a technique is almost unknown. In Godard’s *Contempt*, a husband and wife quarrel, and the scene ends with her swimming out to sea while he sits quietly on a rock formation. On the sound track, we hear her voice, closely miked, reciting a letter in which she tells him she has driven back to Rome with another man. Since the husband has not yet received the letter, and perhaps the wife has not yet written it, the letter and its recitation presumably come from a later point in the story. Here the sound flashforward sets up strong expectations that a later scene confirms: We see the wife and the husband’s rival stopping for gas on the road to Rome. In fact, we never see a scene in which the husband receives the letter.

Nondiegetic Sound Most nondiegetic sound has no relevant temporal relationship to the story. When mood music comes up over a tense scene, it would be irrelevant to ask if it is happening at the same time as the images, since the music has no existence in the world of the action. But occasionally, the filmmaker uses a type of nondiegetic sound that does have a defined temporal relationship to the story. Welles’s narration in *The Magnificent Ambersons*, for instance, speaks of the action as having happened in a long-vanished era of American history.

An Abundance of Choices As viewers watch a film, they don’t mentally slot sounds into each of these spatial and temporal categories. We offer them here as a way of looking systematically at creative decisions filmmakers have made. Once we’ve done that, we can use the distinctions to help understand our viewing experience. Tracing out the choices explicitly offers us ways of noticing important aspects of films—especially films that play with our expectations about sounds. By



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Some films include voice-over narrators talking to us. Sometimes the narrator is a character in the story, sometimes he or she is an external voice of authority. But what do we do with the character narrator who happens to be dead? Posthumous voice-over has become a common convention in films, television, and graphic novels. We look at some early examples in “Dead man talking.”
<http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2015/08/24/dead-man-talking/>

becoming aware of the rich range of possibilities, we're less likely to take a film's sound track for granted and more sensitive to unusual sound strategies.

Conversation Piece

Francis Ford Coppola's *The Conversation* makes fluent use of many of the options we've surveyed in this chapter—particularly the ways in which sound works in space and time. But instead of using sound to help us follow the action, the film's sound track creates ambiguities about the action, and eventually it helps us reflect on how we can *misunderstand* what we thought we heard.

The plot centers on Harry Caul, a sound engineer specializing in surveillance. Harry is hired by a shadowy corporate executive to tape a conversation between a young man and woman in a noisy park. Harry cleans up the garbled tape, but he starts to suspect foul play and refuses to give the tape to his client. Harry obsessively replays, refilters, and remixes all his tapes of the conversation. Finally, Harry arrives at a good dub, and we hear the man say something extremely damaging.

The overall situation is quite mysterious. Harry does not know who the young couple is. (Is the woman his client's wife or daughter?) Still, he suspects that they are in danger from the executive. When the executive's hirelings steal Harry's tapes, he feels he is involved in a criminal plot. After a highly ambiguous series of events, including an overheard act of violence, Harry realizes that the basic situation was not as he had thought.

From the very start, *The Conversation* suggests that we can't trust what we hear. The problems are initially about space: What is the source of the sound on the track? As described in Chapter 5, the film begins with a long, slow zoom in on a bustling city square at lunchtime (5.41–5.43). Initially we hear a Dixieland combo playing "Bill Bailey," gradually increasing in volume as the camera enlarges the view. Almost immediately, the music starts to warp and distort. Is the interference part of the sound track? Is it a glitch in the theater's sound system?

The distortion returns periodically during the band's next number, "When the Red, Red Robin (Comes Bob, Bob, Bobbin' Along)." Eventually, the film's first cut reveals a man on a rooftop. He aims a shotgun microphone at the young couple who are the target of Caul's surveillance (7.77, 7.78). The sound we've been hearing is not that heard by the people on Union Square, but rather the audio picked up by this microphone. Our initial impression was that these sounds were external and objective. Now, however, we realize that at least some of them were the input to the unknown technician's headphones. This apparently objective, external sound is colored by subjectivity.

After an extreme long shot of the city square with the camera closer to ground level, a cut back to the musicians brings with it a jump in the volume of the music.



7.77



7.78

7.77–7.78 Blurring the boundaries between objective and subjective sounds. After the opening shot of the conversation, we're shown a man on a rooftop overlooking Union Square (7.77). He is aiming a microphone toward a strolling couple (7.78). The revelation suggests that the sounds heard in the first shot were transmitted to his headphones and hence subjective to a degree.

This implies a shift to a more objective narration, particularly as the camera picks up passersby as they cross the frame. Eventually, though, the scene's action returns to the couple, following them as they talk. The harsh distortion returns, suggesting that all this, too, has been audio picked up by a microphone.

We start to realize that Harry has other sound recordists planted in the square. One shadows the couple's movements, while another sits in a van monitoring all the audio inputs. Any of the sounds we've been hearing could be what one of these spies' microphones have picked up. This creates a continual play between offscreen and onscreen sound. Once we're shown that the surveillance team surrounds the couple, we often hear their conversation over shots in which they aren't present. Throughout the opening scene, the sound sources don't mesh comfortably with the images.

Coppola's spatial manipulation of sound departs from convention in other ways. As the scene develops, the couple walks toward a group of drummers playing in the park. The music's volume swells as they approach, creating a massive "foreground plane" of sound (7.79). When the man leans in to tell the woman something, his line is buried under the hammering of the drums. This is the line that Harry will devote himself to revealing.

As *The Conversation* develops from this opening, the play with sound space is accompanied by an indeterminate use of time. The narration tightly restricts our knowledge to Harry's. We are with him in nearly every scene, and we sometimes enter his mind. We see a haunting, apparently prophetic dream at one point, but at other moments the narration doesn't signal when it moves to subjectivity—when, that is, the sound is in Harry's head.

At a crucial point Harry employs equalizers and filters to uncover what the man said in the drumming scene. To some extent, his task is like that of Jack Terry in *Blow-Out*: reconstructing an event that isn't what it seems (p. 265). But Jack has access to photographic evidence he can sync up with his recording, whereas Harry has only the sounds. Here is where Coppola and sound designer Walter Murch start to manipulate auditory time.

As Harry obsessively replays his tapes, Coppola could have only shown shots of him working with his gear. Instead, the film's imagery returns us to the pivotal moment in the conversation (7.80, 7.81). We get a visual flashback, with the plot repeating action shown earlier in the story. Is it Harry's memory? Unlikely, since he didn't see this part of the conversation. Most likely, this passage is simply the narration's repetition of the moments in the city square. As an objective flashback to what occurred, it seems to be like those rearrangements of story chronology we find in *Pulp Fiction* (p. 80). Thanks to the repetition of actions and camera positions we saw earlier, *The Conversation*'s flashback to the first scene seems reliable.

That impression, however, is undercut by noise and hiss on the tape recording. If the image is supposedly in the past, then the sound is in the present, as Harry patiently cleans it up. There is a temporal split between image and sound. Still, both channels seem compatible. We're cued to assume that the present-time sound replays are, like the images, accurate and reliable—what others would hear if they were at Harry's workstation. And when Harry's tweaking makes the man's line intelligible, the sound seems to fit what we see. Later, however, we will find that the reconstruction we hear is open to misunderstanding.

The disjunctions between past and present, onscreen and offscreen sounds, and external and internal sounds run through the film. Although the opening has warned us to be on our guard, Coppola trusts that our habits will lead us to keep misinterpreting what we see and hear. The film's surprise climax and its lingering mysteries rely on sonic ambiguities operating in space and time.



7.79 Sound mixing as creative choice. As the couple approaches the drummers in the foreground, the music drowns out what they're saying. Normally dialogue takes precedence on the sound track, and music and ambient sounds soften to accommodate it (see 7.12). Coppola, however, uses a realistic soundscape to limit our access to the couple's talk. The man's key line of dialogue will be inaudible to us.



7.80



7.81

7.80–7.81 Blurring the boundaries between past and present. The recording process splits the time periods represented in the images and the sounds. Shots of the couple belong to the past, but what the man is apparently saying is played back on tape in the present. The imperfections in the recording force Harry, and the audience, to fill in what the conversation really means.

The Conversation shows that distinguishing different types of sound can help us analyze filmmakers' creative choices. The film, like the examples we've analyzed in this chapter, also suggests that our categories correspond pretty well to how viewers understand what they hear. We unconsciously distinguish between diegetic and nondiegetic, internal and external, simultaneous and nonsimultaneous sound. That's not surprising. Filmmakers have worked for nearly a century to establish those conventions.

Coppola, like other filmmakers we've considered, plays with those conventions. But he still counts on our knowing them. By surveying options for creating the sound track, we can make explicit what audiences and filmmakers take for granted. We can also analyze how more experimental films appeal to our assumptions about sound. By considering both the conventions and the ways they may be manipulated, we gain an understanding of how sound shapes our experience of a film.

SUMMARY

As usual, both wide viewing and focused attention will sharpen your awareness of this technique. You can get comfortable with the analytical tools we have suggested by asking several questions about a film's sound:

1. What sounds are present—music, speech, noise? How are loudness, pitch, and timbre used? Is the mixture sparse or dense? Modulated or abruptly changing?
2. Is the sound related rhythmically to the image? If so, how?
3. Is the sound faithful or unfaithful to its perceived source?
4. Where is the sound coming from? In the story's space or outside it? Onscreen or offscreen? If offscreen, how is it shaping your response to what you're seeing?
5. When is the sound occurring? Simultaneously with the onscreen story action? Before? After?
6. How are the various sorts of sounds organized across a sequence or the entire film? What patterns are formed, and how do they reinforce aspects of the film's overall form?
7. For each of questions 1–6, what purposes are fulfilled and what effects are achieved by the sonic manipulations?

Practice at answering such questions will familiarize you with the basic uses of film sound.

As always, it isn't enough to name and classify. These categories and terms are most useful when we take the next step and examine how the types of sound chosen by the filmmakers function in the total film.

CHAPTER

8

Summary: Style and Film Form

In Part Two, we considered how the parts of a film create its overall form and how that form engages the viewer. In this, the third part of the book, we've explored the techniques of the film medium. Just as narrative filmmakers decide how to construct a plot that will shape the viewer's experience, they make choices within each of the areas of technique we've examined—mise-en-scene, cinematography, editing, and sound—and then organize those choices. The distinctive patterns of technique we find in a film constitute its style.

The Concept of Style

From the start of this book, when we examined Michael Mann's production of *Collateral*, we've seen how artistic decisions govern a film's distinctive style.

The earlier chapters in this part showed how a film's style is coordinated with its overall form. Buster Keaton's use of deep space reinforces the comedy of *Our Hospitality*'s plot, and Jean Renoir's long takes and camera movements create connections and parallels among characters in *Grand Illusion*. John Huston's choices about continuity editing emphasize certain aspects of the opening of *The Maltese Falcon*, while Sergei Eisenstein's discontinuity editing provides thematic commentary on the action of *October*. We've also analyzed how the opening sequence of *The Conversation* establishes story action and creates ambiguities about who is hearing what. Our smaller examples have pointed to the same conclusion: Patterns of techniques work within the film's overall form, shaping the effects the movie has on its viewer.

As a start, then, we use the term "style" to talk about particular films. Sometimes, though, critics talk about style in several films by the same filmmaker. We examined how *Our Hospitality* organizes its comic mise-en-scene around long shots; this is part of Buster Keaton's style in other films, too. It's not surprising that we extend the term to talk about a filmmaker's distinctive style across several films. Everyone builds up certain habits in ordinary life, a particular way of dressing or talking or behaving with others, and we often call that his or her personal style.

In art, as in ordinary life, this styling may be done deliberately or without much thought. Either way, it comes down to decisions. Recall a quotation from Chapter 2: "At the point of making the movie," says Ethan Coen, "it's just about making individual choices," and his brother Joel adds: "You make specific choices that you think are appropriate or compelling or interesting for that particular scene. Then, at the end of the day, you put it all together and somebody looks at it and, if there's some consistency to it, they say, 'Well, that's their style.'"



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Two radically different film styles are considered in "Tony and Theo." For an example of a filmmaker's distinctive style, see "Alexander Payne's vividly shot reality."

"The choices you make push you in a certain direction, and that becomes what people call style."
—Chris Doyle, cinematographer, *Chungking Express*



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A screenwriter-director explains his choices in "David Koepp: Making the world movie-sized."

The term "style" has still other meanings. Sometimes we speak of a *group style*—the consistent use of techniques across the work of several filmmakers. We can speak of a German Expressionist style or a Soviet montage style. In Part Six, we consider some significant group styles that have emerged in film history.

CREATIVE DECISIONS

Style and the Filmmaker

Throughout this book we've suggested that considering a filmmaker's creative options can make you a keener viewer. When it comes to style, as with form, creative choices aren't infinite. The filmmaker is always choosing within limits.

What can limit the choices? For one thing, technology. Before 1928, directors didn't have the option of using synchronized dialogue, and making films in lifelike color was very difficult and expensive. Even today, when the range of technical choices seems far broader, there are limits. Contemporary filmmakers can't use the orthochromatic film stock of the silent era, although in some respects it was superior to today's stocks. As digital grading improved, filmmakers had to abandon the advantages of photochemical grading.

It isn't only technology that constrains creative choices. So do tastes, fashion, dominant trends, and stylistic norms. D. W. Griffith is acclaimed as a great director, but directors today would be reluctant to let their performers display the sort of acting we find in *Intolerance*. Few directors have the power to make a black-and-white film today, since it's widely believed that audiences will spurn films that aren't in full color. Changes in viewers' tastes eliminate certain options.

Some constraints, as we saw in Chapter 1, stem from the mode of production in which the filmmaker works. The studio mode of production developed a standardized menu of options, such as continuity editing, partly because that makes planning, shooting, and postproduction more efficient. Filmmakers working independently have more freedom to make daring choices about form and style, as is seen in limit cases like Michael Snow's *Wavelength* but also in unusual films like *Memento* and *Run Lola Run*.

Filmmakers know that making one decision doesn't end the matter. One choice leads to further choices—and constraints. If you shoot a conversation in the intensified continuity technique, giving each speaker a tight single shot, you'll probably have to cut more often. You need to remind the audience of the other characters who are present, even if they don't speak. If you choose to play a scene in a long take, your actors' performances must be more carefully timed and executed than if you build the scene out of lots of cuts. Choosing to shoot in 3D enforces a new set of constraints. With a distant convergence point (p. 180), a character in the foreground can't be partly cut off by the left or right frame line, because then the audience sees a bisected body floating out at them. Every choice creates new problems to be solved.

As a result of pressures like these, a filmmaker tends to rely on similar techniques across the film. After certain choices have been made in one scene, it's easier to replicate them in another. But there are more positive reasons why directors embrace certain possibilities and rule out others. Most directors feel comfortable with a particular stylistic option because it suits the stories they're telling. Antonioni's complex staging techniques in *L'Avventura* are appropriate for characters whose feelings fluctuate unpredictably from moment to moment (4.124, 4.125). The filmmaker's personality plays a role too. Some directors prefer straightforward, efficient technique, while others, like Alfred Hitchcock and James Cameron, enjoy setting themselves technical problems. And some filmmakers want to find new possibilities in the techniques that appeal to them. Eisenstein plunged into editing because he believed he could force it to do things it had never done before.



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We trace the stylistic and formal development of a major contemporary filmmaker in "The sarcastic laments of Béla Tarr." On the styles of two art film directors of the previous generation, see "Bergman, Antonioni, and the stubborn stylists."

Decision Making: Techniques Working Together

Because one choice creates further choices later, filmmakers tend to think out their decisions fairly carefully. Many, for instance, watch for ways to create parallels among situations and characters. Piotr Sobociński, cinematographer for Krzysztof Kieślowski, says that in *Three Colors: Red*, a crane shot down to a fashion show was designed to recall an earlier camera movement, when the camera craned down as a book fell into the street. Similarly, in filming *Viva Zapata!* Elia Kazan tracked in on Zapata, who is ignoring the fact that a crowd of peasants is marching with him. "We had to go close on that shot and dolly [i.e., track] because what I wanted to show was his expression or lack of expression. We later contrasted that with a similar dolly shot on the police chief beginning to notice what was happening. The point was to contrast those two attitudes."

Films setting up narrative or thematic contrasts may recruit several techniques to reinforce them. Jacques Tati's *Mon Oncle* opposes the charm and community spirit of old Parisian neighborhoods to the sterile, enclosed homes that replace them. M. Hulot lives in a ramshackle apartment building on a quiet little square. The Arpel family—Hulot's sister, brother-in-law, and nephew—have just moved into an ultramodern house full of high-tech gadgets and chic but uncomfortable furniture. Scenes in Hulot's neighborhood tend to be accompanied by jaunty music. In this locale, the camera stays outside his apartment, stressing the interactions of the many people living and working around the square (8.1). By contrast, the Arpel scenes contain no music. Instead, we hear the tapping of shoes on stone floors and the clicks and whirs of the absurd appliances. There are frequent shots inside the house, and the street is almost invisible behind the family's security wall (8.2).

Many filmmakers let stylistic elements cooperate to differentiate locales or story lines. In *Inception*, a complicated science fiction plot takes its characters into four layers of dreams within dreams. Each dream level involves a distinct fantasy world, and about midway through the film, the action starts shifting abruptly among these levels. Yet settings, costumes, lighting, color schemes, weather, and other aspects of the mise-en-scene allow us to keep track of which level each shot occurs in (8.3–8.6). Cinematographer Wally Pfister said of the different levels, "We wanted to have the color palette change quite a bit when we go from one location to another. . . . You immediately know where you are, even if we cut to a tighter shot or to something that is slightly out of context. It's a choice that helps tell the story." Steven Soderbergh's *Traffic* uses color contrasts to help spectators follow the three plotlines as he crosscuts them. There are washed-out, yellow images for the scenes in Mexico, blue-cast scenes for the story of a newly appointed drug czar and his addicted daughter, and a more conventional range of colors for scenes involving the wealthy wife of an arrested drug smuggler.

When we see techniques lining up and working together this way, it's likely that the patterning has been created more or less consciously by the filmmaker. Perhaps it wasn't done through elaborate storyboarding or deep thought. Often, as the Coens' remarks suggest, a director may shoot one scene fairly spontaneously, then realize that another scene could parallel it through lighting or music or some other technique. That is, the filmmaker may discover significant patterns while making the film. The task then becomes to find ways to enhance those patterns in ways that will give the audience a particular experience.



8.1



8.2

8.1–8.2 Old style community, modern domestic fortress. In *Mon Oncle*, Mr. Hulot chats with a neighbor while others pass (8.1). The Arpels' inconveniently laid-out garden has a metal security door that blots out their view of the street (8.2).